Mothers undertaking part-time Doctoral study: Experiences, Perceptions and Implications

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Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experience of women with children, i.e. 'mothers' undertaking part-time doctoral study and considers the challenges and conflicts that arise from what Brown & Watson (2010) describe as 'dual lives', managing the doctoral student role with the roles of mother and worker. The research aimed to consider extant conceptualisations and understandings so that alternative discourses could emerge, viewing the part-time doctoral experience through the lens of mothers. This was undertaken through the analysis and application of conceptual frameworks that fuse Communities of Practice (Wenger 2008), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985), Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987) and Lived Experience (Manen 1990). The marginalized voices of 'Mothers doing doctorates' provide a new perspective on the 'non-traditional' PhD student experience, allowing a deeper understanding of the challenges facing this 'community' by identifying and analysing key themes of identity, motivation, feelings and beliefs within a framework of communities of practice.

Identifying Wenger's Communities of Practice as a framework for discussion, a model was developed in relation to the field data to understand the women's experiences of part-time PhD study. This model focused on four key areas: learning as belonging, learning as becoming, learning as doing and learning as experience. Each area related to a major theme in the women's experience, that of identity, motivation, the student experience and their own feelings and perceptions about themselves and the process.

The findings determine the process of studying for a PhD provided the women with a means of identity expression that had previously been stifled through the adoption of the role of being a 'mum'. Through part-time doctoral study, this sense of re-awakening both intellectually and personally provided women with a renewed sense of positivity and confidence, demonstrating a resistance against the dominant ideology that dictates women's 'natural' place is in full-time motherhood (Hughes 2002). It provided them intellectual stimulus and allowed them a voice, that the mother role had smothered as it was not in-keeping with the in-group identities highlighted by the women as central to their public and private domain. The academic development of the women helped them to

see themselves as ‘worthy’, strengthening their own identity as they developed a redefined sense of self.

In securing data from thirty-five women, this research provides an original insight into the experiences of an obscured and marginalised group. The combination of narrative and autoethnographic methods has surfaced original data that highlights the experiences and impact of part-time PhD study on women with children. The contribution to current thinking around part-time PhDs is the critique of extant normative practice, this research illustrates and exemplifies how these existing processes marginalise mothers doing part-time doctorates and points to new approaches in practice.

Preface

During my employment as a lecturer, I became pregnant twice in two years. The back-to-back maternity leave left me with 'return dilemmas' considering motherhood in dispute with the working woman concept which left me questioning my role in both the public and private domains (Millward 2006).

Whilst I was away careers were advanced and the department recruited new members of staff. I was fearful of being considered a peripheral member of the team, someone who was deemed not fully committed as I now had responsibilities outside of the workplace that outweighed those of the lecturer role. I felt the challenge would be to reconcile the demands of work with family (Grady & McCarthy 2008).

I felt I needed something new to prove myself all over again and for me, a PhD was the answer (Halpert & Burg 1997). Due to the commitments of being a mum and working, I had to enroll on the PhD part-time and try to fit the studying into an already hectic lifestyle. The challenge of juggling work with studying and childcare has been incredibly difficult and as a result, the so-called 'student experience' has passed me by. I missed out on the community side of Higher Education so I looked for an insight into how women like me dealt with the whole PhD journey but there was nothing in the literature that covered the experiences of mothers studying for a research degree: how they felt, how it affected their lives, how their experiences shaped who they were. For me, this is the starting point of my study, to hear other women's stories. What it is that drives them, that makes them study despite time constraints and familial responsibilities, what is it that they think postgraduate education can do for them and if and how it has had an impact on their identities and their lives. It is these issues of identity, motivation and lived experience that are explored further within this work. The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort.

Contents

1. Introduction

This thesis is about mothers and their experiences of part-time doctoral study. Using thematic narrative analysis, the experiences of a group of 35 student mothers were analysed. The women shared their accounts of the process of being a mother and a part-time student, recounting their thoughts and feelings as they encountered the demands of studying. To establish an understanding of the context within which this study is focused, it is important to examine the current higher education sector and establish existing and forecast trends regarding postgraduate education. It has been identified by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) that the nature of higher education is changing and developing. The student demographic is shifting, with one of the most notable developments being in the number of women embarking on postgraduate study. Investigating this demographic is therefore important, both for the women who embark on their studies as non-traditional students and for the universities, who, in a climate of increased competition between institutions, can benefit from a pedagogic insight into their current and potential students. 'A richer understanding of non-traditional doctoral students and their lived experience is required' (Petersen 2014:824). The following section provides an overview of the contemporary UK Higher Education environment.

There are 169 higher education institutions in the UK, serving 2,266,075 students, 539,440 of these being postgraduate. (HESA 2014/15). Focusing on research degrees, in 2013-14, there were 111,490 students enrolled on postgraduate research degrees, 73% of these students were full time, 27% were part-time (Universities UK 2015:5). There has been a slight decline of 4.3% in part-time postgraduate research students over the past ten years up to 2012-13 whilst full-time research student numbers have increased by 40% (Universities UK 2014:25) The lack of growth in part-time enrolments has been attributed to a number of factors including the economic downturn placing financial pressure on individuals who may have self-funded whilst working and companies who may have considered supporting an employee, whilst the increase in fees and regulations around

eligibility for student loans have limited other options for financial support (Universities UK 2015:8).

The higher education market is becoming increasingly competitive, with students becoming more discerning when considering their choice of institution. This is due primarily to league tables, the National Student Survey and the increase in tuition fees of up to £9,000 (www.direct.gov.uk) resulting in higher education institutions having to re-consider their strategic intent and focus on a consumer-led approach, rather than the product-led strategy of the 1990's (Kotler & Fox 1995). The pressure to build student numbers in the current economic climate is forcing many institutions to re-evaluate their current communications strategy (Angell *et al.* 2008; Drummond 2004; Ivy 2008). Historically, university institutions have perhaps not paid as much attention as they possibly should to their marketing communications. This will have to be re-evaluated by institutions if they are to reflect a more consumer-oriented approach to student recruitment and retention. The capping of government funding for undergraduates combined with the predicted population trend of a fall in the 18 – 20 age group until 2019 (Universities UK 2008) is forcing institutions to have a renewed focus on the area of postgraduate study. With this situation comes a need for a more targeted approach to marketing, as this consumer group is far more complex and diverse both in its requirements and expectations of postgraduate courses than its undergraduate colleagues. Whilst historically there have been more male doctoral students than female, there has been in increase in the last few years, in the number of women enrolling in doctoral programmes (Brown & Watson 2010), many of whom enroll part-time, adding to the diversity of the postgraduate student population.

There is a growing accountability demanded in research quality and an overall heightened focus around the impact of research. This has led to changes in policies and procedures of doctoral programmes and a more regimented approach to the enrolment and subsequent training and supervision of doctoral candidates (Halse & Mowbray 2011). There has also been growing interest in the issue of widening participation at doctoral level, considering under-represented groups of potential postgraduate students and the need for them to have the same opportunities for success as their peers (McCulloch & Thomas 2012). This

identification of a shift away from the 'traditional' doctoral student suggests that there will be increasing diversity in the population of emergent PhD students and their mode of study. They are likely to have a wider range of needs and demands different to those of the traditional or stereotypical student and will require Higher Education institutions to consider how to reflect this diverse population in their PhD policies and provision. Understanding the needs of non-traditional students is therefore the first step in catering to a broader population of postgraduate students. Despite there being a number of studies addressing concerns that arise frequently in discussions with postgraduate students, there is no indication within these studies as to the demographics of those involved in the research. There is therefore little opportunity for further analysis of the implications of gender and lifestyle in the data. Whilst the information is useful and provides context for this study, it is worth noting the gap in knowledge regarding gender and lifestyle specific data.

There have been a number of studies recognizing the need for more information on postgraduate study however, they all address the demography of students in general terms. The National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) (Groves 2002) commissioned the University of Warwick Student's Union to carry out a national survey of UK postgraduate students, with one of the questions focusing on the factors of motivation that students take into account when considering postgraduate study. Despite the data highlighting issues that are key in the decision-making process for postgraduate students such as financial obstacles, the significance of location and reputation and the lack of importance of social and recreational facilities, the focus was not on a specific demographic. The NPC (Brown 2003) published a further report the following year investigating experiences and facilities for postgraduates, highlighting the problems of isolation, lack of opportunities to collaborate and share ideas, pressures outside of studying and restrictions from activities and seminars due to working hours, as common concerns for the postgraduate community.

The Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) published a study for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in 2008, which identified trends, financial position and first destinations of postgraduate students in the UK 2000/01

to 2005/06. Although the data covered a considerable number of years and students, sub-groups of non-traditional students were not highlighted or considered as a separate demographic. The postgraduate community is diverse in its population, to combine them all as one without identifying the diversity of students will not provide a detailed understanding of the cohort and assumptions may be made about them if there is no attempt made to address them as having different needs.

A study by the Higher Education Academy (Park 2008) focused on the taught postgraduate student experience, exploring student satisfaction according to eight themes: 'Teaching and learning; assessment and feedback; organization and management; student support, advice and resources; information, advice and guidance; motivation and choice of institution; views of non-UK students; support for particular groups of students.' Although many of these themes are crucial to understanding postgraduate students, again the samples were not segmented any further than gender, thus leaving a gap for further investigation. This is important, as HEFCE data have demonstrated that the people least likely to complete a PhD within seven years are women over 30 studying part-time, yet there is currently no data examining exactly why this is the case (HEFCE 2007). As recently as 2004, Leonard *et al.* were able to say 'we know surprisingly little about what motivates people to undertake a doctorate in the UK, nor how they experience it' (Leonard *et al.* 2004:369). Since then further research has been undertaken and evidence developed to fill the gaps in our knowledge in many areas of the doctoral experience, but we remain in a situation where we know very little about women with children.

This study will therefore focus on one particular segment of the postgraduate market, mothers. This group are predominantly over 30 as the average age of giving birth to a first child in the UK is 29.6 years of age (Thompson *et al.* 2012) and would consider part-time study as a feasible option due to the demands of childcare and possibly work commitments. According to HEFCE (2007) women over the age of 30 are deemed the least likely demographic to complete a part-time doctorate. The focus will be on the 'lived experience' of the respondents undertaking part-time doctoral study. Although women have certain experiences in common and will face at times, situations of

inequality, they are not bound by an identical set of narratives (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). It can be argued, that human beings in many regards, are unique with regard to distinctive personalities, upbringing and consequent choices through life. Of course, many human beings share generic common contexts for example physical environment and shared experiences however, even though these experiences are generic, the individuality and idiosyncrasy of a human being still persists. Gender is one contextual factor playing a major role (Marandet & Wainwright 2010) with the classic gender binary divide being male and female. Isolating women as a group, it can be argued that each woman has a set of circumstances unique to her however, these individual experiences can have similar themes and areas of similarity can be identified from which meaningful observations can be made. 'It is important to give women the space to have their voices heard and valued and to make meaning of their own experiences (Spears Studdard 220:26).

> 'Allowing respondents to provide narrative accounts of their lives and experiences can provide good evidence about the everyday lives of research subjects and the meanings they attach to their experiences' (Elliott. 2005:17)

This study will evolve an inductive methodology appropriate for this research, developing a personal description and analysis of the researcher's lived experience with that of a sample of student mothers. Through a series of in-depth interviews, where the questioning is driven by information from the informant, the researcher will endeavour to grasp an understanding of the mother's experiences within a framework of higher education provision.

1.1 Background and historical context

Higher education is perceived by many as a route to new experiences, a mechanism to discover oneself and fulfil potential, which was a recurring theme throughout the experiences of the women participating in this study. The 'route' specific to this study is that of postgraduate education and the focus is not just about how the women navigate the worlds of family and education but how higher education institutions respond to such encounters with student mothers. Student mothers may have needs or experience problems that are different from those experienced by the main student body, this study will highlight the current research and further explore these issues. There are a number of emergent themes relating to a mother's experience of postgraduate education, the core areas of identity (Evans & Grant 2009), motivations (Cole & Gunter 2010), familial responsibility (Mason, Wolfinger & Goulden 2013), and the often conflicting roles of the student v's mother (Castaneda & Isgro 2013) are echoed in most of the studies included in this discussion and will be explored further during the course of this thesis. As women are the focus of the study, it is useful to identify at this stage the historical context of the role of women in society, the struggle for equality and the role of education in that struggle.

1.1.1 Women's role in society

> 'Gender role refers to the behaviours, attitudes, values and beliefs which a particular society expects from or considers appropriate to, males and females on the basis of their biological sex'. (Giddens 1989:556)

To be able to understand the experiences of student mothers', one must recognize the wider context of the narrative. This section of literature highlights the challenges of a gendered society, sexual stereotyping and economic inequality faced by women in society today. Humans are influenced by social codes and institutions and despite feminists' keenness to disaffiliate domestic labour from a women's role, there are social pressures

reinforcing a familial ideology that defines the woman as at the heart of the domestic sphere (Cranny Francis *et al.*, 2003). This is supported by Hayes *et al.* (2002:64):

> 'Societal prescriptions of gender define women's identity. Furthermore, women's self-esteem is integrally interwoven with their responses to learned gender roles, gendered behaviour, and ways of thinking'.

Gender stereotyping in the media where women are routinely associated with sexuality and domesticity has helped enforce beliefs about gender roles and it is this social conditioning that has resulted in the confusion and blurred lines of who a woman is, who she wants to be and how she is perceived when her choices break the patterns of behaviour established by society. It could be argued that certain practices in society push women into identities of non-participation (Wenger 2008). If these practices are ingrained over time, then it becomes difficult to identify a different approach. This process of a dominant group defining a perceived inferior group is known as 'othering' (Fine 1994) and in the context of this study, the 'othering' is that of the non-male (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio 2004). 'Othering' is a way of creating inequality by a group defining another as 'morally or intellectually inferior' (Schwalbe *et al.*2000:423) and it is through this process of identifying the failings or differences of the 'othered' group that they can be marginalized. Josselson (1996:28) suggests that in identity formation, women link who they are internally with who they are recognized as being by society 'identity is what we make of ourselves within a society that is making something of us'. This reflects the situation of the women in this study, they experience a blurring of identity as they attempt to shift from mother to student. This transition is made harder by the societal expectations of how the women should behave. Mrs. Henry Sidgwick of the women's institute writes in 1897,

> 'a man's profession not only helps him to marry, but his marriage will probably lead to increased energy in his profession. With a woman it is otherwise. If she marries, her profession must, as a rule, become secondary to family life' (1897:18).

Women of the post-war generation have created lives beyond the confines of the marital home but there is still an imbalance within employment. Despite the Equal Pay Act 1970 there is still gender segregation in paid work, with men working full-time earning more than women in the same role, and women working part-time dealing with a pay gap of 38.8% (Perfect 2013:5). As 89% of the women in this study work, reflecting on the economic imbalance can demonstrate how a woman's professional identity can be affected by becoming a mother. According to the think-act-report initiative by the Government Equalities Office (2015), women earn 20% less on average than men, despite efforts to remove barriers in the workplace. Pascal & Cox (1993) highlight one of the main issues facing the economic inequality, 'few women follow the traditional men's pattern of 40 pensionable years in an occupation, women are affected by domestic responsibilities and often switch between paid and unpaid work' (Pascal & Cox 1993:41). This is supported by data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) which indicates that only 61% of women with children under the age of five were in employment, this rises to 73% when the children are between the ages of five and ten and 78% when the children's ages were between eleven to eighteen (ONS 2014). In contrast, the age of children has no impact on men, around 92% of men with dependent children were in employment regardless of the age of their youngest child (ONS 2015), suggesting that it is the role of the woman that changes when they have children, as they adapt to accommodate childcare around their working lives. This primary carer role is then continued as children reach school age and beyond.

This has an impact on the gender pay gap, which widens with men earning considerably more than women when looking at the 40-60 year-old age group. In an attempt to understand the 'family gap' in wages, Waldfogel identified that women without children can earn close to what men earn however mothers earn considerably less (Waldfogel 1998). This earnings gap is identified by Zhang (2009) as being substantial between mothers and women without children. It is often referred to in the literature as the 'motherhood penalty' or 'child penalty' (Baker 2010) and is a factor that distinguishes between women without children and women with children due to the perception by employees that mothers are less qualified, competent and committed to the job (Carroll &

Benard 2010; Correll, Benard & Paik 2007; Gash 2009). This is reflected in research conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission who found that one in nine mothers (11%) reported that they were either dismissed, made compulsorily redundant, or treated so poorly they felt they had to leave their job whilst one in five mothers said they had experienced harassment or negative comments related to pregnancy or flexible working. (Adams *et al.* 2015:9). It is suggested that expectations around motherhood deny women opportunities for occupational mobility and wage growth over time (Abendroth, Huffman & Treas 2014; Kahn *et al.* 2014) and can impede their propensity to entrepreneurial risk (Humbert & Brindley 2015) and business growth potential (Rouse 2009). This is reflected within academia, as women without children maintain full time employment and take advantage of training and career advancement (Gangl & Ziefle 2009) whereas mothers are less likely than fathers or childless women to reach the senior ranks of academia (Monroe, Ozyurt, Wrigley & Alexander 2008; Nakhaie 2007). The advancement of mothers is further impeded by limited maternity leave policies and expensive childcare (Forson 2013; Rouse & Kitching 2006). Considering the family gap in the context of Higher Education, Baker (2012b) suggests that most women believe motherhood to be a more significant career barrier than gender with research demonstrating that having a family can slow career progression of female academics (Mason & Goulden 2004b). This echoes Wolfinger *et al.* (2008) who highlight child-rearing obligations as a major obstacle to equality in academia. According to Stack (2004:891) the 'time, energy and money devoted to child rearing can reduce research productivity' which can have implications not just for qualified academics but those undertaking research degrees. As a part-time PhD student, the recommendations are that you must dedicate a minimum of eighteen hours to your thesis a week. This can prove very difficult for women with children according to a study by Bittman and Wajcman (2000) who considered the free time of women with children and identified that those with children under two years reported only two hours and thirty-eight minutes of free time a week. This increased to five hours and twenty-three minutes when their children were between the ages of two and four then to nearly twenty-five hours when the children were between the ages of ten and fourteen, highlighting the lack of time available to women with young children who wish to undertake a PhD.

‘By failing to understand the impact of public and private professional and mothering identities, reproduction of subtle forms of inequality or even injustice may be perpetuated’ (Haynes 2006:622). Inequality leads to a woman’s lack of economic power relative to their partner, affecting their spending power and penalizing their retirement security. This financial inequality combined with the societal enforcement of the woman at the centre of the framework of familial responsibility can help shape a woman’s sense of self, limiting her options as she conforms to become an extension of what people think she should be, ‘social guidelines tell them if they are doing a good job’ (Josselson 1990:2). These social guidelines reflect expectations of the mother role being the primary focus (Laurijssen & Glorieux 2013; Van der Lippe & Peters 2007). This can cause internal conflict for women as these boundaries of what is perceived as acceptable behaviour often perpetuate the guilt women have when attempting to close the gap between ‘self-image and ‘ideal self’ (Gross 1987:220), or in the case of this study, the mother image and the image of who they feel they could be in the light of new experiences and challenges. The women’s motivations to embark on a PhD are highlighted within this study as a major theme for exploration, despite the challenges facing this particular cohort, they are motivated to continue due to the need for autonomy and an improved ‘self-concept’. These themes will be discussed in detail within the literature review and findings of the research. The routes providing mothers with new experiences such as education or training often involve time spent away from their familial roles, which can deter women from pursuing them due to feelings of guilt at not meeting role expectations. The conflicting loyalties as the student identity challenges the mother identity can be a ‘source of struggle and discontinuity’ (Haynes 2008:634) and will be raised for further discussion within this study.

Feminism is open to much interpretation due to the variations of the ‘type’ of feminist movement one can choose to be affiliated with, such as Liberal, Radical, Marxist and Socialist, yet all are working as agents of social change (Gluck 2011). The core themes of wanting equality legally, economically, politically and socially, challenging women’s subordination and questioning the imbalance in gender roles have transcended time and regardless of how strident a feminist one claims to be, these core themes are integral to women now and historically (Benn 1996). In acknowledging the struggle for equality that

women have had, and their quest for access to higher education it can help in understanding the challenges faced by women historically, and can begin to contextualize this study and identify higher education as playing a key role in the growth of independence and equality for women. Moreover, the link between the role of education in women's lives historically and the role of education in women's lives today will emerge, as the findings of this study highlight. The opportunities offered by higher education institutions to women aided the growth in awareness of women's rights, as education allowed an insight into a world beyond the domestic sphere:

> 'Woman's proper place in education is one of equality – but that can only be achieved when man's place in the house becomes one of equality too. Women's place in education will be nearer when Mothercare is renamed Parentcare' (Delamont, 1990:14).

1.1.2 Higher Education Provision for women

> 'When women first asked for University Education, the important thing was to get higher education of some kind, to find some outlet for cramped minds and some satisfaction for aspirations' (Sidgwick, 1897:6).

This discussion provides an insight into the literature that documents the slow development of educational offerings to women. It provides a contextual view of the inequalities in education faced by women historically and reinforces how important it is that women today have the opportunity to enter higher education alongside men as equals. This literature highlights parallels between the historical narrative and present day as both the rationale for wanting an education and some of the difficulties faced by women with children taking on the role of student are the same.

The path to education for women was not easy as they faced opposition from entering what was considered a man's domain but due to the growth of good secondary education for girls, the interest in Higher Education developed and inspired the introduction of the National Union for improving the Education of Women in 1870 (Bartley 2004). Dyhouse (1984) looks at the entry of women into higher education from 1860 and analyses whether it has actually led to a shift in social standing for women. She agrees with Sidgwick on the benefits of higher education, how it provided women 'valuable space for learning and self-expression and played a crucial role in the history of the feminist movement' (Dyhouse 1984:55). However, she also discusses what she refers to as the 'hidden curriculum' of the colleges in the late nineteenth century. Due to late Victorian England being deeply patriarchal in its views, women felt that 'going to university, as a social experience, confirmed their deference to the male intellect and confirmed their lowly sense of themselves as relatively insignificant females' (Dyhouse 1984:57). Women battled with the domestic ideology that only recognized opportunities for women's learning when it enhanced their role in the home through domestic studies classes and bible study (Coats 1994). The image of women 'undergraduettes' as they were mockingly called by Punch magazine was further rubbished by their portrayal in the press as 'ugly, mannish and sexually deviant' (Coats 1994:58).

> 'Girls who are natural, and would like to be (well) married, would do well to avoid education, remembering that the personal advantage to the highly educated women impairs her usefulness as a mother. Those who overtax their vital energies by an intellectual strain likely to produce ill effects on their offspring, ought to accept a voluntary celibacy. They are self-made invalids and must accept the penalties of the position' (Churchill 1887).

Historically therefore, women have been excluded from the realm of academia, 'traditional constructions of the university student were male, both materially and conceptually' (Leathwood & Read 2009:96). A paper titled 'The place of university education in the life of a woman' delivered to the women's institute in 1897 by Sidgwick, provides a clear insight into the development of women's access to Higher Education

(H.E.) It reflects the feminist standpoint of education providing a sense of self-worth and empowerment to even the balance of the sexes in society. Sidgwick reflects that in the 1860's, it was the norm to consider whether women were capable of coping with a university education, both intellectually and physically. Could they cope with the 'strain' and would their health suffer? There were concerns that it would 'unfit women for the functions and duties of wives and mothers' (Sidgwick 1897:3). The suggestion was that women made a choice, she either got married and had a family or chose to have a career, and it was perceived as unthinkable to do both. Over one hundred years later, the role of wife and mother and the balance between women's private and public identities is still a factor in women's educational choices (Coats 1994; Pascal & Cox 1993; Wisker 1996). If a mother's priorities feature interests outside those of the familial role, the 'cultural images of motherhood provide coercive prescriptions of gender behaviour that influence them' (Haynes 2008:627) shaping the way the identities of student and mother align.

Despite the potential misogynistic attitude displayed by sections of society at that time, women who entered Higher Education wrote autobiographical accounts describing 'the freedom of being away from the tyranny of family life' (Dyhouse 1984:57). This is echoed by Tamboukou (1999) in her study of autobiographical accounts from women 1860 – 1914. She frequently traced words in relation to education such as 'get out', 'be out', 'spread my wings' and 'leave', all reflecting the feelings of confinement and oppression that women of that time felt. It is suggested that the road to higher education for women is not as straightforward as some historians may believe and questions about the progress made with regards to a woman's position in society are being asked.

> 'Why, in spite of one hundred and fifty odd years of struggle at all social levels, in which the rhetoric of equality emerged triumphant, women's situation remains what it is. Why is it women are still so massively under-represented, so conspicuously lacking in power and status in the more exclusive areas of higher education' (Dyhouse 1984 :52).

This reflects the contemporary issues around inequality in academia, the societal enforcement of the woman as primary carer, the guilt felt on the pursuit of new challenges, the motherhood penalty, the lack of time and the conflicting loyalties between the student/ worker and mother identities. Despite the Education Acts of 1902, 1918 and 1936 'patterns of differentiation by gender and social class continued to shape the female experience of education' (Purvis 2005:121). Towards the end of the second World War, the Education Act of 1944 determined all children up to the age of 15 the right to free education, but as girls began out-performing boys in the 11-plus they were allowed fewer places. 'Education for women centered around domesticity, it was considered important for 'social cohesion' rather than self-improvement' (Purvis 2005:123). This suggests that education was not considered a key driver on a woman's development, instead it was peripheral to her domestic responsibilities. The inequalities in higher education were highlighted in an early study considering the experiences of female doctoral students. They reported the women often faced 'unsupportive and antagonistic faculty' and were considered to be wasting their training as it was predicted they would just get married and raise children instead of using their education to forge a career (Holmstrom & Holmstrom 1974:2). There were no expectations of women combining motherhood with an academic career, these two roles were considered in binary opposition to one another. These ideals regarding women putting their role of 'carer' over career are still prevalent in society today as will be demonstrated within the findings of this study.

The parallels between women's roles in the public and private sphere in the late 1800's and present day become apparent as the literature unfolds. 'The same spirit that motivated women to attend school before the duties of the day can still be seen in the lives of many women today, who fit their studies into the early or late hours to avoid clashes with work or family demands' (Coats 1994:10). The recurring themes of a patriarchal society enforcing stereotypical gender roles, a woman's need for freedom from the domestic responsibilities, the belief that they have unfulfilled potential, the need to re-form their sense of self, the lack of time and the multiple roles all suggest that 120 years is not that long in the struggle for equality. 'The lives of women returners, irrespective of class, symbolize a perpetual 'juggling act' between the demands of family and education' (Smith

1996:72). Leathwood & Read (2009) argue that despite assumptions of the feminization of higher education, women may still face conflicts with the constructions of traditional femininity, which assume they will 'stay close to home, find a good man, get married and have children' (Leathwood & Read 2009: 115). To have traversed through these specified 'stages' and then enter higher education is a decision made with many conditions and often sacrifices on the part of the female student. 'Vastly increased female participation in the paid workforce over the last decade has not seen any parallel diminution in family and household responsibilities' (Cranny-Francis *et al.* 2003: 224). It has been suggested that women have to balance their educational commitments with their family lives, feeling pressure to achieve success in each.

1.1.3 Part-Time Study

'Starting a part-time PhD is a high-risk venture' (HEFCE 2005:32).

It could be argued that due to the 'juggling act' between the demands of family, work and education (Leonard 1994; Smith 1996) mothers cannot commit to dedicate the time required to study full time. This therefore leaves them with the option of studying part-time whilst managing their various other commitments. The experience of studying part-time brings with it a unique set of circumstances that the women have to navigate alongside their existing childcare responsibilities. Whilst it is acknowledged that the challenges of part-time study affect all part-time students, male and female, it is the role of mother alongside studying that is the focus of this study due to the complexities of the multiple identities adopted by mothers. There are numerous options available for people wishing to embark on postgraduate study, the offerings include taught master's degrees, education doctorates, CPD qualifications, doctorates through publication, professional doctorates and the PhD route. As there is a distinct lack of research looking at women and the doctoral programme, this study will focus on women taking the part-time PhD route.

A report by HEFCE in 2007 examines completion rates in the UK and draws on data collected from PhD students who began their doctorate in the 1996/97 academic year up to 2005; a second report in 2011 draws comparisons between PhD starters 1996-97 to 2009-10. The HEFCE information relating to this thesis had been extracted and utilised in an attempt to contextualise the current data for PhD study. The report found that the percentage of full-time female students completing within seven years was 70% but this dropped to 35% for part-time students. The age profile of students played a significant role in the rate of completion with older students (over 30 years) having a lower completion rate on both full and part-time programmes, the report highlighted that there is a decreasing probability of completion as the age on starting the PhD increases. If a student commences a PhD at the age of 39, the research indicates a completion rate of just 20%.

Doctoral Completion Rates within 10 years (HEFCE 2007)

Age	Full-time	Part-time
Under 25	81%	57%
25 to 29	75%	55%
Over 30	70%	45%

The negative association between completion rates and age is further demonstrated when considering commencement within 10 years. The demographic with the lowest rate of completion in 10 years are women aged 38 studying part-time (:22).

With the average institutional proportion of part-time students achieving a PhD within seven years being 34% (:30) the HEFCE research considered what the rates would be if they took active students after the seven years into account. They found that the overall completion rates would rise from 71% to 82% for full-time students and the part-time completion rates would increase from 34% to 62%. This suggests that although completion takes longer, the part-time students do not simply discontinue their studies after seven years, there are other factors that have to be taken into account that impede

their work and force them to consider the doctoral programme as a long-term process. For some part-time students, the elements of their lives that compete with time spent on research make a seven-year timescale an unrealistic one.

The characteristics of full and part-time students was explored in the HEFCE study (2011) and unsurprisingly, students with no financial support are less likely to complete. Other comparable attributes of full and part-time students that HEFCE consider could hinder completion are those over the age of 28 and those students without a first class degree. Highlighted below are the number of students enrolled on full and part-time PhDs who have no financial backing, are over 28 and actually do have a first class degree, indicating the low numbers of those part-time students with a first.

	Full-time	Part-time
No Financial backing	19%	57%
Students aged 28 and over	36%	86%
UK Students gaining a 1st class honours degree (of those qualifying the previous year)	12%	1%

(HEFCE 2011)

The HEFCE report (2005) concludes by estimating that 'only one in three part-time PhD students is likely to submit a thesis within six years' (:32). Part-time students require persistence if they are to complete a doctorate within the given time frame of seven years as their situations often conflict with the requirements of academic work. These students have often been prevented from taking the full-time route due to other obligations in their lives, whether they be familial, financial or work related. Most adult students are therefore part-time students. They have sufficient family, financial and career commitments to preclude becoming a full-time student for the duration of a programme and study has to be accommodated alongside an existing web of obligations and duties (Kember 1999). In a study of the progress of women doctoral students studying at Stanford in the US, women who completed their PhD later than the programme preferred, referred to as 'late finishing'

women, despite being motivated to finish in a timely way, encountered obstacles such as child-care responsibility, disruption of family life and a lack of confidence in their ability to make the system work in their favour. 'Early-finishing' women however, did not experience such obstacles (Maher *et al.* 2004). Although these women were studying full-time, the study provides further evidence that having primary caring responsibility for your children can impede progress in doctoral study, a theme that is recurring throughout this study both in the literature and in the findings of this research.

There are numerous factors affecting part time PhD students that full time students can avoid, having to switch from everyday work to research work, the evenings and weekends taken up by study instead of leisure time and the financial implication of self-funding whilst engaged in employment. In addition to the workload PhD students have, for mature women students, there are often demanding domestic circumstances to cope with, juggling caring responsibilities for children or elderly relatives (Phillips & Pugh 1998). Part-time students can be perceived as less committed than full-time students (Curran 1987) be less satisfied with their experience due to feelings of invisibility within the academy (Neumann & Rodwell 2009) and can struggle to balance their numerous roles (Watts 2008). Many part-time students experience a sense of detachment from the institution (McCulloch & Stokes 2008) and a lack of involvement and knowledge acquisition (Gardner & Gopaul 2012; Pyhalto *et a*l. 2012). The nature of part-time study usually means the student chose the part-time route due to other competing demands on their time and they adopt numerous roles in fulfilling those demands. They are therefore seen to be in a constant state of negotiating professional, student and personal identities (Teeuwsen *et al.* 2014) and with these fluid identities they shift between a range of roles including employee, spouse, parent, sibling and colleague. This 'fractured identity' (Watts 2008) complicates their approach to the role of student as the engagement with the role and therefore their studies is disparate.

The additional demands faced by a part-time student, including familial care and employment can impede a smooth transition through the PhD process, leading to longer completion times or sometimes an interruption of studies (Curran 1987; Davis & McCuen

1995; Gatrell 2006). As a result, they are seen by many as 'transient' rather than full-time members of the research community (McCulloch & Stokes 2008). These 'forgotten' students are something that Nuemann & Rodwell (2009) identify as a key problem when creating a research culture across an institution. The experience of belonging and participation in the academic community is considered 'an essential component for the development of socio-psychological well-being, with students feeling less stressed, exhausted and anxious' (Stubb *et al.* 2011:44). However, the experience of isolation appears a widespread and seemingly 'necessary' feature of the doctoral programme for many (Johnson *et al.* 2000). This lack of socialization can have a negative impact on doctoral retention as students feel marginalised and can have little interaction with faculty members and fellow students. The problem of isolation is a particular problem among sub-groups, specifically women (Conrad & Phillips 1995).

> 'The academic structures, conventions, traditions and normative socialization patterns are typically not designed to allow students with children, whose schedules and responsibilities are often demanding, much flexibility' (Gardner 2008a:133).

The issue of balancing responsibilities alongside a sense of obligation to put their familial role above all others, raises an interesting question around the motivation of mothers to embark on postgraduate education despite the highlighted role conflict. This is supported by Hayes *et al.* (2002:54) 'much of women's learning has to do with women's identity and self-esteem' and is reflected by Scott *et al*. (1998) who suggest that education provides the opportunity to develop and express an identity outside the role of wife and mother and Chan (2003:479) who describes entering a doctoral program as a critical turning point as she changed from a woman 'locked in her family domain' to 'a female elite accepted in the academic domain'. Thus, it would seem that some mothers have a desire to use education as a platform for regaining a sense of themselves away from the domestic sphere, discovering a new aspect to their identity instead of accepting the role of mother as defining them absolutely. These experiences will be further explored and highlighted though existing studies on postgraduate education for women.

2. Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine and understand the lived experience (Manen 1990) of women with children undertaking part-time doctoral study, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort. It is through the transition from mother to student to PhD, that the women in this study gain confidence in their own self-image in a process of 'becoming' and feel their true self can be expressed (Brown 2009). It is this experience that will be explored within the following discussions, in an attempt to understand the women's motivations, their perceptions of the process and the implications undertaking a part-time PhD can have on their lives.

Many commentators still consider women to be economically unequal due to the gender gap in pay (Pascal & Cox 1993; Perfect 2013; Waldfogel 1998). Despite the inequality, many women still strive to achieve more from their professions, demanding more from the government and employers regarding flexible working, equal pay, maternity and paternity rights and improved childcare support. They are also demanding more from themselves. Women embark on new careers, accept promotions, re-train and re-educate themselves after having children. The experiences of women who embark on new challenges during motherhood can inspire other women to take on things they perhaps did not consider feasible with children. This discussion focuses on the experiences of women who, since having children, have identified doctoral study as a challenge fitting their current context, state of mind and self-perception. Their motivations revolve around the need to re-evaluate and re-establish their sense of self. Having lost perspective of who they once were pre-children, embarking on a PhD allows them to gain a clearer understanding of the potential for a new self-image. This self-image is explored during the doctoral process as the women adapt to different sub-groups, shifting identity characteristics to attain acceptance to new groups whilst attempting to maintain membership within existing groups.

This study is conducted from a feminist standpoint perspective, and is informed by and connected to feminist ideology regarding the process and goals of the research. Feminist Standpoint Theory was developed reflecting Marxist perspectives (Hekman 1997) and aims to analyse how relations of domination are gendered and challenge existing systems of patriarchy and capitalism (Naples & Gurr 2013). The theory has developed over time from a method for highlighting the oppression of women, to an approach that 'redefines some of the basic parameters of hegemonic discourse' (Hekman 1999:51) allowing women's experiences to be visible without being positioned as privileged and in doing so, acknowledging that women's experiences are not homogenous (Tanesini 1999). Standpoint considers those whose perspectives have been ignored or overlooked due to them not reflecting the privileged viewpoints held by more dominant actors. 'Due to relations of domination and subordination, women develop a perspective on social life that differs markedly from men' (Hesse-Biber 2013:28). Standpoint theorists attempt to locate a standpoint in a particular community rather than from a specific individual (Naples 2003), reflecting a certain social situation (Harding 1993) and acknowledging the importance of consciousness raising as a process to enable women to share their experiences (Fisher 2001) whilst 'analysing the social and political mechanisms by which women are oppressed (Naples & Gurr 2013:30).

Standpoint theory considers members of marginalized groups to have a greater understanding of social contexts than those from dominant groups, as they not only experience their own realities but 'witness other realities through engagement with dominant groups' (Naples & Gurr 2013:33). Being aware of the dominant worldview of society and their own minority perspective is known as 'double consciousness' (Hesse-biber & Leavy 2007). However, it is important to recognize the context of such experiences and acknowledge that the standpoint of marginalized groups 'still requires theoretical reflection' (Harding 1998:150). Researching women's lives therefore recognizes that 'women belonging to different groups lead different lives' (Tanesini 1999:151) and their experiences are partial rather than universally representing all women. Feminist standpoint places women at the centre of the research process, 'women's experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge' (Hesse-Biber &

Leavy 2007:56). Standpoint can therefore provide a platform for analysis of the experiences of the women in this study as it could be argued that mothers studying part-time are a marginalized group in the context of Higher Education. They are categorized as non-traditional students, their lifestyles do not reflect those of the full-time research student, their time is restricted due to childcare responsibilities, their access to institutional events is limited and they are described by existing literature as 'invisible' (Neumann & Rodwell 2009) and 'transient' (McCulloch & Stokes 2008).

Feminist critiques of the mainstream social sciences focus on the invisibility and distortion of the female experience (Allan 2011; Davies *et al*. 1994; Jackson 2004). It is important to reflect the thoughts of a movement striving for equality and to consider the perspective of those who consider that women are not given enough of a voice in society. Analysis of society is usually grounded in the experiences of men, the male-oriented discourse is considered the norm rather than the exception. Feminist theorists such as Rich (1997) identify the social devaluation and powerlessness expressed by women.

> 'Feminist theorists are sensitive to the ways in which gendered features of our world are taken for granted and are therefore invisible. This invisibility serves those with more power and resources and not those with less'. (Stewart 1994: 11)

This is certainly the case in higher education, where the institution is deemed a patriarchal environment (Leathwood & Read 2009).

> 'Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being…..He is the subject, he is the Absolute – She is the Other' (De beauvoir. 1953: xvi).

When considering the literature on Higher Education, it became clear that mothers as a distinct population are largely overlooked by existing studies. They are often classed as non-traditional as opposed to the traditional student of 17 or 18 years of age moving to H.E. straight from previous study. They are therefore outside the realms of what has been

described by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) as the 'ideal learner', one who is 'male, white, middle-class, an autonomous individual unencumbered by domestic responsibility, poverty or self-doubt' (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003:599). Mothers and their experiences are lost among a non-traditional cohort who are segmented as having at least one of the following characteristics: from an ethnic minority group; had a long-term disability; possessed non-standard qualifications on entry to higher education; were aged over 25 years on entry to university; were from lower socio-economic groups of origin. (National Student Survey 2005-2007). Whilst it is acknowledged that there are fathers studying for part-time PhDs facing a series of challenges as they navigate their way through managing study and childcare, the focus and interest within this study lies in the female perspective. A range of commentators have noted that academic institutions hold values that privilege a masculine world view (Davies *et al.* 1994; Mason & Goulden 2004a; Wisker 1996; Wolf-Wendel & Ward 2006). This study will challenge the current framework to allow an alternate discourse to emerge, viewing the part-time doctoral experience through the lens of mothers. These marginalized voices provide a new perspective on the 'non-traditional' PhD student experience, allowing a deeper understanding of the challenges facing this group.

This study considers the experiences of mothers as doctoral students, so it is important to highlight a range of perspectives on motherhood. Despite the many positive aspects to the role of mother, due to societal expectations reinforced by media representations of 'perfect mothers', the role is complex and the definition of mother is subjective. Even the word mother is frequently qualified, the 'working mother', the 'stay-at-home mother', as if there is a need for clarification on the women's position with the role of mother (O'Reilly et al. 2005). Each individual has their own view of what a mother is and should be and the role is not made easy by the guilt-inducing opinion that a mother should be selfless in their role, responding to pressure from the public sphere and conforming to others' expectations of how a mother should behave. 'Women are told to put aside their intellectual and sexual identity, in fact to lay aside identities other than mother and wife' (Marshall 1991:76). In her work on motherhood as 'experience' and 'institution', Adrienne Rich (1976) argued that institutionalisation of motherhood reduced the female identity to maternity. The role

of the woman in the family is at the heart of her difficulties as she manages tensions between the public and private sphere, causing an 'overloading' effect on each role (Rueschemeyer 1981). For the purpose of this study, the definition of 'mother' is a woman who has children under the age of 18. Whilst it is acknowledged that once children turn 18 women still remain their mother, this study was focused on women who had dependent children who were not adults.

Perceptions of motherhood are shaped by the media representation of women and the perceived norms of the mother role (McRobbie 2013; Orgad & De Beneditis 2015). There is a constant flow of media images of 'the supermother who excels in her career without making concessions to motherhood, doing all the things 'good mothers' are expected to do' (Phoenix et al. 1991:197). This socially constructed image is enhanced by the proliferation of experts informing women how a mother should behave. The social and psychological constructions of 'normal' mothers run counter to the reality of motherhood (Phoenix et al. 1991:13) and this surveillance of motherhood eventually becomes 'self-surveillance' as the women reflect and monitor their actions against the prescribed norms (Lawler 2000:20). These societal expectations of how mothers should behave is described by Rotkirch et al. (2009) as the 'motherhood myth'. The motherhood myth manipulates mothers into excessive focus on their children, considering their own needs as inconsequential and feeling the only appropriate course of action is intensive maternal investment in their child. In adopting this approach mothers are left feeling that they are never meeting the unattainable standards of the perfect mother and experience a sense of guilt and failure, 'cultural expectations of extensive and perpetual high-quality maternal investment or the "motherhood myth" induce guilt in mothers (Rotkirch et al. 2009:90). This 'motherhood myth' is identified by Hays (1996) as 'intensive mothering', a term highlighting the all-consuming approach to motherhood where all needs are sacrificed for your child.

The implications of women with children choosing to undertake a doctorate has been under-researched. In an attempt to address this imbalance in knowledge, this study will examine their lived experiences to better understand this particular group of students. This

subject matter will be explored in the following way. The introduction has considered women's role in society and the historical context of higher education, tracking the growth of involvement of women in higher education, noting that even when women were allowed access to institutions, it was only the childless and unmarried that considered this an option. The literature review considers the role of communities of practice as a theoretical framework with which to underpin the women's experiences. The normative role of communities of practice is highlighted, identifying the four components that are explored in relation to the experience of mothers within the findings and discussion. The second part of the literature review explores issues around identity and motivation exploring both academic identity, the identity of the mother and the development of the self in relation to education and the motivation of women to embark on higher education. Doctoral studies and the part-time doctorate are all discussed within this chapter.

The methodology highlights the use of both autoethnography, thematic narrative analysis and template analysis. Autoethnography as a method has been adopted to aid communication and understanding of the researcher's transparency and subjectivity within this research, by providing a narrative of her own experiences as a mother undertaking a part-time PhD. In acknowledging her experiences as similar to the women respondents she is linking the individual and collective experiences (Coffey 1999). The use of thematic narrative analysis and template analysis allows the researcher to explore the possibility that the women's experiences demonstrate similarities with key themes linking the individual experiences and narratives.

The findings and discussion of this study provide a critical understanding into the reality of being a mother whilst studying for a part-time PhD. There are themes that emerged from the thematic narrative analysis that provide a framework for discussion around motivation, identity, the student experience and their perceptions of the impact of the PhD on the women's lives. The thesis concludes by considering how the data generated by this research can be used to help both mothers considering embarking on a part-time PhD and institutions who have mothers wishing to enroll with them. In identifying the challenges

and the steps that can be taken by institutions to improve the experience for part-time PhD mothers, there is a possibility that the process can be improved for all involved.

With a view to developing a clearer understanding of the experiences of women with children whilst exploring institutional approaches to doctoral study the following research questions were developed.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD in the UK?
Research Question 2: How does studying for a part-time PhD impact on their lives?
Research Question 3: In what ways can Higher Education Institutions in the UK improve the part-time PhD experience for mothers?

This thesis plans to make a contribution to knowledge by developing an understanding of the experiences of mothers undertaking part-time doctoral study using a model developed from Communities of Practice theory, highlighting issues for improvement of the experience of part-time doctoral students in Higher Education institutions. Currently, little is known about this particular cohort of PhD students. Their experiences are under-researched despite a growing number of women embarking on doctoral study. In exploring the experiences of this group of women, their narratives can inform both potential PhD student mothers and the institutions with which they will study. The Communities of Practice framework assumes that, as individuals learn they participate in a community of practice, moving along a trajectory from novice or 'newcomer' to expert or 'old timer' (Lave & Wenger 1991). It could be argued that this reflects the normative approach of PhD study, students begin the process with limited knowledge, then through interaction with other students, researchers and professionals and with the guidance of their supervisor they acquire new knowledge, develop a shared repertoire of skills and eventually become 'master practitioners' themselves as they achieve a PhD (Wenger 2008). This framework has therefore been used to map the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to explore whether they adhere to the same normative community of practice framework or whether their experience differs. Using communities

of practice will therefore aid in highlighting any deviation from the normative PhD experience. To help in this process of understanding, Communities of Practice theory has been utilized and detailed in the following chapter.

3. Literature Review: Communities of Practice

3.1 Introduction

Communities of Practice is a social theory of learning that considers learning as participation and it is through this engagement in actions and interactions that learning transforms the social structure in which it occurs (Wenger 2008:13). We all belong to a number of communities of practice, whether these be informal friendship groups or more formal communities of work colleagues. Each is a place of learning and knowledge sharing that engages its members to varying degrees depending on their own level of commitment, knowledge and involvement. The two key concepts of the approach taken by Lave and Wenger (1991) are communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, both of which have been used to create a concept of learning as part of a social activity, whereby the individual's identity is considered in relation to their participation in a community of practice (Fuller *et al.* 2005). Lave and Wenger (1991) developed this theory due to their dissatisfaction with existing understanding of the process of learning, which considered individuals as needing an educational context, a 'teacher' and a process of one-way knowledge transmission (Fuller 2007). They explored the idea of knowledge and learning being fluid concepts that could exist and develop in a variety of social settings and incorporating a multitude of differing skill levels or levels of knowledge. Cox (2005) echoes this approach, highlighting the ambiguity of the terms community and practice and suggests this provides a fluidity to the concepts themselves, allowing them to be used in a variety of ways. The initial focus of the theory was about newcomers and apprentices gaining a route to knowledge through existing members (Lave & Wenger 1991) whereas later work by Wenger (2008) concentrated on the impact on an individual's identity when participating in a community of practice. The act of learning therefore has an impact on our own identities, shaping and developing who we are and who we envisage ourselves becoming. It is this transformation of identity that is key to this study as it echoes the experiences of the women respondents, they use learning and participation in communities of practice to re-develop their identities (Fontaine & Miller 2004). The communities of practice the

women were involved with were varied and include online communities, weekend research support groups, reading groups and residential weekends. The nature of involvement or participation in the communities of practice vary from peripheral member to full member to being excluded from participation altogether (Lea 2005; Smith & Rust 2011).

> 'Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers and about activities, identities and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991:29).

Legitimate peripheral participation is therefore a position that a member of the community of practice adopts as part of the process of moving towards full membership of the group. Peripheral participation is, as the name suggests, marginal involvement. This reflects the position of many of the women respondents as they discussed their minimal involvement in the communities of practice and echoes the work of Teeuwsen *et al.* (2014) who argue identification with the academic community of practice can be problematic when students are enrolled part-time. It is argued that learning takes place on a number of different levels, the content of what is being learnt, the social involvement of the participants and the actual process itself of learning all combine to enhance the experience of learning, rather than simply focussing on an end goal or result (Bradley 2004; Hezemans & Ritzen 2005; Hill & Haigh 2012; Keay *et al* 2014; Morton 2011;Yakhlef 2010). It is this combination of variables that highlights the complexity of the situation of the women respondents as they often failed to experience the social involvement of learning and the process was regularly fragmented as they experienced low engagement with the institution and their supervisors. Their learning was therefore self-directed rather than collaborative (Monaghan 2011). Due to the personal circumstances and restrictions the women had to manage they were often excluded from the numerous communities of practice such as research seminar series, research training and doctoral conferences. As apprentice learners are surrounded by the characteristic activities of their trade (Lave 1991:69) so too are PhD students who observe research skills and academic writing practices from research seminars, conferences and reading groups. The community of practice allows the PhD students to become peripheral participants and through interaction with other members, over time they develop skills

appropriate for full membership, at the same time developing confidence in their knowledge as they become 'master practitioners' (Keay *et al* 2014; Land 2003; Lave 1999; Pyhalto & Keskinen 2012; Stubb; Pyhalto & Lonka 2011). This reflects another change in the students, a shift in their identity, as through the process of doctoral study they experience a transition from PhD student 'newcomer' to a doctor of philosophy 'old timer'. Again this reflects the thinking of Lave and Wenger (1991) in their theoretical approach to communities of practice because in moving towards becoming a full member, one's position in the community of practice changes and their self-categorization of student identity enables them to reflect the characteristics of the student in-group or student community of practice and their identity reflects this shift (Shacham & Od-Cohen 2009; Turner 1987; Zhang & Watts 2008). However, Smith and Rust (2011:117) argue that communities of practice in higher education are increasingly difficult to develop and sustain. They suggest there is not only fragmentation by discipline, there is 'fragmentation by function' in higher education, with staff separated from students and administrators into various roles of lecturer, researcher and manager, which prevents any possibility of joint enterprise or mutual engagement. There is also the concern that peripheral participation can be viewed negatively if members remain on the margins of the community of practice, never moving towards a fuller involvement in the learning process (Brooks 2010; Tilley 2003). Despite the acknowledged barriers to establishing academic communities of practice, the benefits can be recognised for staff and students as a coming together of people with similar academic interests rather than functions in an institution (Pharo *et al* 2014).

Wenger (2000:227-228) discusses three modes of belonging that he argues are an aid to identity formation through participation, these are engagement, imagination and alignment. Engagement is the act of doing things together, whether it be working or just talking, it is the interaction and participatory nature that establishes engagement. Imagination, as described by Wenger (2000), relates to 'constructing an image of ourselves, of our communities and of the world to orient ourselves, reflect and explore possibilities'. He suggests that imagination is required to formulate an image of ourselves in the context of not only the community of practice but of the world around us. Alignment is the third mode of belonging and is described by Wenger (2000) as 'a mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions so they realize higher goals'. This mode of

belonging ensures we as individuals look further than our own activity to align with other processes that engage more members and practices into the learning process. This literature raises issues around the level of involvement the members, and in this study, the women, have with each mode of belonging.

In identifying that a community of practice is a combination of three elements, the domain, the community and the practice, Wenger (2011) highlights the domain as crucial to the creation of a community of practice, as membership suggests a 'commitment and shared competence that distinguishes members from others outside the group' (2011:1-2). The characteristic of community is another important element, suggesting that members must interact, share information and learn together and from each other to create a community of practice, proximity or similarity in role or circumstance is not enough to classify a group as a community of practice (Parker *et al* 2012; Pharo *et a*l 2014). The third element, practice, provides members with the information necessary for learning. Wenger (2008:73) outlined three dimensions of practice that form a community, mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement highlights the requirement for members to interact with each other and form relationships based on a mutual understanding and shared beliefs and goals (Harvey *et al* 2013; Pyhalto & Keskinen 2012). This leads to joint enterprise which instils in members a sense of mutual accountability around their engagement and the process of learning (Hill & Haigh 2012; Stubb, Pyhalto & Lonka 2011). Members recognise that the community has connected them and that they are part of a community with identifiable goals and an understanding of what is expected and what is acceptable as a member (Keay *et al* 2014; Yakhlef 2010). As a community of practice develops, with them develops shared repertoire of words, routines and ways of doing things that are part of their practice (Knight & Trowler 2001). These shared resources reflect the mutual engagement and reinforce the sense of joint enterprise among the community of practice (Harvey *et al* 2012; Parker *et al* 2012).

3.2 Four components to learning

Wenger (2008) developed four components to learning that highlight the key areas of consideration within a community of practice. These components have been identified by the researcher as reflecting the learning experience of mothers undertaking part-time PhDs and have therefore been introduced as a framework to further understand these experiences.

Learning as belonging – Community. Where participation is recognizable as competence.

Learning as becoming – Identity. Learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

Learning as doing – Practice. The shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement.

Learning as experience – Meaning. Our changing ability, both individually and collectively, to experience our life and the world as meaningful.

(Wenger 2008:5).

The four components signify the four key areas identified in the analysis as most relevant to the women respondents.

3.2.1 Community: Learning as belonging

This relates to the student experience, the difficulties of studying part-time, the role of the supervisor, the infrastructure and support systems. According to Wenger (2008:4) learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon and it is this social participation with people being active participants in practices of social communities which then aid in identity construction in relation to those communities. 'Communities of Practice is not just about knowledge transmission, it is the interaction and communication between individuals in the group as they learn from one another, solve problems together and new knowledge is created' (Hildreth *et al.* 1998:276). This is highlighted by Hopwood (2010) who argues that individual learning is a social process and that students' academic work

is facilitated by social encounters and collective learning with each other which, according to Leonard & Becker (2009) is critical to the success of doctoral students. This is echoed by Hasrati (2005) who found that PhD students gained a great deal of knowledge from these informal interactions, their participation in communities of practice that allowed them peripheral participation provided a foundation for fuller participation in the future (Hasrati 2005). Knowledge is therefore considered as a 'living process', an integral part of activities and interactions rather than a static body (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002:9). However, communities of practice should not be confused with a team, a business unit or a network, it is defined by knowledge and by the shared passion and interest of its participants whose identities are shaped by belonging (Wenger & Snyder 2000). Communities of practice can be 'free' and take the form of informal groups and networks or they can adopt a more formal approach and involve organisations or businesses (Hezemans & Ritzen 2005). This is reflected in the indicators identified by Wenger (2008:125) that a community of practice has formed:

1.Sustained mutual relationships

2. Shared ways of engaging in doing things together

3. Rapid flow of information

4. Absence of introductory preambles, conversations and interactions are a continuation of an ongoing process

5. Quick set-up of a problem to be discussed

6. Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs

7. Knowing what others know and can do to contribute

8. Mutually defining identities

9. The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products

10. Specific tools, representations and artefacts

11. Shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter

12. Jargon and shortcuts in communication and ease of producing new ones

13. Certain styles recognised as displaying membership

14. A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the World

These indicators reflect a broad approach to developing a community of practice and indeed, lean towards an informal environment that requires participants to know each other and furthermore be comfortable enough to engage in a joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 2008). This setting therefore requires participants to engage enough to foster familiarity and recognise the differing yet balanced abilities within the community of practice (James 2007; Keay *et al* 2014; Morton 2011).

3.2.2 Identity: Learning as becoming

This reveals the many roles the women have in the various communities of which they are peripheral or full members. Self-categorization theory (Turner 1987) highlights the shift in characteristics to reflect the different community nuances. Participation in communities of practice is more than direct engagement with specific activities, the different forms of membership we have are a component of our own identities, as highlighted by Lave & Wenger (2008:151) 'identity is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities'. Communities of practice are an integral part of our lives, developing an identity through a community of practice is a motivating factor in the learning process (Lave 1991) and according to Wenger (2008) everyone knows which communities of practice they belong to, whether they are peripheral of full members and what the qualifying criteria are.

Legitimate peripheral participation is a way of understanding learning, it is the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice and it offers a two-way bridge between the development of knowledgeable skill and identity (Lave 1991:68). A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant (Lave & Wenger 1991:29). One of the intrinsic

rewards of learning is value of participation, becoming part of the community, moving towards full membership of a group and increased sense of identity within that community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wisker *et al.* 2007). This seems to indicate that being part of a community of practice is a process that involves motivation and identity formation. It raises an interesting question regarding the women in this study and how they could move from legitimate peripheral participation to full membership when the process of participation in the student community of practice was so difficult due to their life circumstances. Thus it would seem they were denied a true experience of a community of practice, instead remaining on the periphery and not feeling an affinity to the student identity or student community of practice. It must be acknowledged that full membership is not always the desired outcome for individuals. Participants may be satisfied with peripheral involvement if they feel there is still an aspect of mutual knowledge exchange and enhancement (Brooks 2010; Cox 2002; Viskovic 2006), however for the women respondents in this study, even peripheral participation was an unrealistic option.

3.2.3 Practice: Learning as doing

This considers the motivation of the women, from initial interest in PhD study to drivers of sustained engagement in the process, reflecting on self-determination theory as a rationale for their continued involvement. One of the critical factors that determines the success of a community of practice is that of the motivation of the members (Ardichvili *et al.* 2003). The women in this study demonstrated high levels of intrinsic motivation, experiencing an inner desire to challenge themselves and enhance their self-esteem through doctoral education. It has been argued that intrinsic motivation is much more effective at stimulating knowledge sharing in a community of practice than extrinsic motives (Osterloh & Frey 2000). There is however little empirical evidence regarding the quality of participation of doctoral students in scholarly communities (Pyhalto & Keskinen 2012). A study by Pyhalto & Keskinen (2012) echoes the philosophy of Lave and Wenger (1991), they found that active participation in the scholarly community of practice reduced disengagement, negative emotions and risk of dropping out. This is further supported by Wisker *et al.* (2007) who identify how communities of practice can

alleviate feelings of isolation and can help maintain momentum for PhD students. They argue that the process of peer-group communities of practice supports a social aspect to learning and leads to a system of research-in-progress (Cox 2013; Heckman & Annabi 2006; Tummons 2012). This is reflected by Wang (2010: 267) who highlights 'cognitive development, opportunities for growth as independent learners and opportunities to practice newly acquired knowledge in a supportive environment' as benefits of a community of practice. This continued and enhanced learning process is an integral part of a community of practice as the newcomers develop and become the masters. This highlights the positive impact a community of practice can have on doctoral students' motivation, as suggested by Shacham & Od-Cohen (2009) academic communities of practice provide PhD students with a forum for consultation, an openness to critique and a sense of empowerment and support throughout the doctoral process.

3.2.4 Meaning: Learning as experience

The feelings, beliefs and impressions of the women in this study expose the role of the PhD in changing their perceptions of themselves and the world around them. It is argued that academic learning changes not only what we know, but who we are (Packer & Giocoechea 2000) suggesting that academic communities help in the formation of our identity (Baker & Lattuca 2010) and self-belief. Many commentators have noted that when women become mothers, there are societal expectations that they sacrifice their own needs and put the child and its care above their own. The Motherhood Myth (Hays 1996), the Code of Goodness (Bepko & Krestan 1990) and the Selfless Syndrome (Lemkau & Landau 1986) all suggest that women are pressured to adhere to unrealistic expectations of how mothers should behave. This leads to feelings of guilt when the women attempt to embark on doctoral education as the requirements for study take them away from the domestic role and therefore away from achieving these images of the perfect mother. This reflects the communities of practice framework that identifies there may be difficulties in participation, 'there are times when society explicitly places us in situations where the issue of learning becomes problematic' (Wenger 2008:8).

Wenger's (2008) community of practice components reflect the key themes of this study, those of identity, motivation, student experience and feelings, beliefs and impressions. Learning as becoming reflects the role of the PhD in the transition from mother to student identity, considering the women's membership and participation in various in-groups or communities of practice. Their participation is influenced by their learning as belonging, the development of academic networks and links for communities of practice and the women's involvement in them, have an impact on their experience as students. The role of identity in the process of studying for a part-time PhD and the need for a sense of community are factored into the women's learning experience, considering the impact of studying on their lives. The subject of identity is therefore a prominent theme within this study and has been identified through the literature in the next chapter. Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987) has been selected as an approach to explain the impact of the in-group identity on the women's experiences, evidencing the complexities of managing multiple roles.

Learning as doing considers the women's academic practice, their motivations for embarking on a PhD and how that is influenced and sustained by the academic networks available, their involvement in community of practice groups, their recognition of themselves as having legitimate student identities and the institutional infrastructure that supports their progress. Their learning as experience is then a process of reflection based on the impact of the part-time PhD on their day-to-day lives, their identities, their relationships and their careers. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985) is a theory that considers the intrinsic nature of motivation and has been used in this study to expose and understand the women's rationale for undertaking a part-time PhD. In establishing the motivation of the women, one can begin to comprehend the lengths that they would go to, to ensure they maintained the PhD alongside their existing responsibilities. The theme of motivation is therefore key to this study and will be further discussed in the following chapter.

In linking these themes to the four components of learning, it demonstrates the correlation between the two and reflects the prominence of the mother's experiences in shaping their own learning. Each component reflects an aspect of their experience, mirroring the themes

highlighted by the women as key to their part-time PhD journey. Each area is important to the women as a separate entity however, they encounter these issues, not in isolation, but as part of an overall experience of part-time PhD study. The following chapter highlights the current thinking around the themes of identity, motivation and experience. In exploring these themes and the theories that reflect them, one can begin to develop an understanding of the challenges facing the women.

4. Literature Review: Identity, Motivation and Experience

4.1 Introduction - Identity

To further explore the areas raised within the communities of practice literature, the following section addresses issues prevalent to the women's engagement with the PhD community of practice, those of identity, motivation and experience.

> 'It is in the realm of identity that a woman bases her sense of herself as well as her vision of the structure of her life. Identity incorporates a woman's choices for herself, her priorities and the guiding principles by which she makes her decisions' (Josselson 1990:3).

To consider a woman's sense of self one must first determine what 'self' actually is. It has been defined as 'self-image' or 'ego identity' as the way in which we would describe ourselves, the kind of person we think we are. In contrast, the 'idealized self-image' or 'ideal self' is the kind of person we would like to be. The greater the gap between our self-image and our ideal self, the lower the measure of how worthwhile a person we think we are, the 'self-esteem' (Gross 1987:220). People evaluate their self-image often without realizing and in considering their ideal self will look towards certain behaviours or actions to close the gap. This study will consider 'self-image' within the context of motherhood and doctoral education.

There are various perspectives on identity creation. It is believed that 'self-identity, as a coherent phenomenon presumes a narrative' (Giddens 1991:76) and is understood as our own sense of ourselves, reflecting our individual characteristics and ideology. This notion of narrative is supported by Lawler (2008:17) 'identity is not something foundational and essential but something *produced* through the narrative people use to explain and understand their lives'. *Social identity* however, is the categorization of us by others, it allows people to communicate a common experience with others they see as having a

similar social positioning. These shared attributes are what enable us to identify with such groups, establishing membership and a collective identity. Building on the concept of identity through others, Cooley considered the 'looking-glass self' which suggests society provides a mirror that reflects to us who we are. In turn we then form a self-image based on how we think others see us (Cooley 1964:184). Cooley suggests that not everyone's views are of equal importance, those who have the biggest impact on our own self-perception are said to be in a primary group. The primary group are people we deem important to us, we have regular interaction with them and they tend to be family and close friends and colleagues. Secondary groups are those with looser connections to us and there is a fluidity to the group dynamics and membership (Stolley 2005). This suggests that not only do we have numerous impacts on our self-perception from a range of social interactions but the biggest influences on our identity are those closest to us, whilst those who we interact less with, hold little sway over our self-perception, regardless of their potential for a positive impact on our identity.

This dichotomy of the public and private spheres of a woman's life are seen as 'segmented worlds' that provide very different and often discrepant meanings and experiences (Berger *et al.* 1974:62). The notion of self in relation to social interaction and the understanding of oneself by how one is understood by others is reflected in the work of Mead (1934) and is adapted by Goffman (1959:15) in his theory of performance. He suggests that the self responds to social situations by performing for the benefit of others in 'idealized performances'. Goffman, in using the term performance, suggests an element of drama, the act of knowingly modifying ones behaviour to reflect expectations of an audience. The act of refining one's actions to become an appropriate image of what is expected is the underlying principle of Turner's (1987) theory of Self-Categorization, a theory derived from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1974) which is considered further in the following section.

4.1.1 Self-Categorization Theory

The complexity of identity formation is reflected in the work of Henry Tajfel (1974) and the development of Social Identity Theory. Tajfel considered that the self-identity is derived from how someone sees themselves in relation to their social group (Fraser & Burchell 2001). This perspective was then developed by Turner (1987) in his work on Self-Categorization, considering how we adapt our behaviour to reflect the stereotype of the group ideal. 'Self-Categorization Theory is a set of related assumptions and hypotheses about the functioning of the social self-concept. The concept of self is based on comparison with other people and relevant to social interaction' (Turner 1987:42). Self-Categorization Theory therefore focuses on the components of social identity, the recognition of an individual's membership to a social group (Hogg 1996). It is a shift in self-perception, from personal to social identity and is considered to be fluid and context dependent (Haslam *et al.* 2000; Turner *et al.* 1994). This differs from social categorization, which is how society feels a certain group of people should behave, based on their role. In the context of this research, the social categorization of mothers is reflected in the literature about societal expectations of women with children. This social categorization of mothers includes the Motherhood Myth (Hays 1996), the Code of Goodness (Bepko & Krestan 1990) and the Selfless Syndrome (Lemkau & Landau 1986) and will be discussed further in this chapter.

According to Turner (1987) there are three levels of self-categorization; a) Super-ordinate level of categorization based on one's identity as a human being, the common features shared with other members of the species, b) Intermediate level based on the social similarities and differences of people in different in-groups and c) Subordinate level based on differentiations between an individual and the other in-group members. These three levels are referred to by Turner as 'human', 'social' and 'personal' identity (1987:45). Self-categorizing at the collective level means people depersonalize the self, considering the similarities between the group members (Prentice 2006). This suggests that people categorize themselves based on their relationships with others in their desired in-group rather than on their own individual traits. This de-individuation allows individuals to adopt

group characteristics that do not necessarily reflect their own character traits but allows them a group identity. Ellemers *et al.* (1999) highlight the importance of affective commitment to a group. They argue that a person's affiliation and subsequent adoption of group traits, depends to some extent on how emotionally involved they are with the group. When considering the numerous identities or diverse selves women have, their 'lifestyle sectors' appear to increase when they have children as they take on the new identity of 'mother'. With this new role comes conflict as the varying identities each one of us have may be in tension, for example women juggling the role of 'mother' with the role of 'worker'. These multiple identities are what Adams (1996) refers to as 'fractured identities'. This thinking is reflected by Josselson (1996: 244) who suggests that people are composed of many discrete 'selves' and in moving among their multiple roles a woman's priorities of interest and purpose may shift over time, 'the dramatic tension in a woman's life occurs among segments of self as she strives to keep them in balance'.

As the role of mother is such a dominant one in society and most women attempt to fulfill the role by adhering to the characteristics in order to be perceived by other mothers as 'one of them,' and 'a good mother', it can be argued that effective commitment to the 'mum group' is very strong and plays a pivotal role in their identity. It is argued individuals have a number of identities, as we interact and involve ourselves in new contexts and experiences we will adopt new roles and develop multiple identities. It can then become more challenging to verify each role and accompanying characteristics and is therefore harder to establish and sustain consistent in-group membership (Stets & Harrod 2004). One way of reinforcing the group's identity is through 'positive distinctiveness', this is a method of emphasizing positive aspects of your own groups' characteristics whilst rating out-groups negatively on comparative traits (Huddy 2001). This then enables a justification of behaviour within the in-group. In the context of this research, this would suggest that the mums' in-group would look at working/studying mums' groups as not being 'proper' mothers and not putting their child's needs before their own. Self-Categorization Theory is therefore a useful tool to explore the differing roles of the women in this study, highlighting through the women's narratives, their own experiences of in-group membership with a view to understand whether the women felt

that the PhD had an impact on their existing in-group identity and if so, what effect this had on their involvement in the various communities of practice they currently belonged to.

4.1.2 Identity in the Public and Private Sphere

Although our social identity can be molded by a connection with others our lives are diverse and are very often split between segments of the public and private domain, with each shaping a different identity. Giddens (1991:83) suggests such segments or 'lifestyle sectors' are a time-space 'slice' of an individual's overall activities. It can be argued therefore that our identities are organic, adapting to internal and external influences, developing and morphing as we grow. This is echoed by Erikson (1968) who argues that identity is a synthesis of all aspects of the self, from the awareness of our bodies, our thoughts and feelings and our social roles to our material possessions and is a function of our growth and experiences. This notion of identity evolving through time is one proposed by Weigert *et al*. (1986).

> 'Identity is a definition that transforms a mere biological individual into a human person. It is a definition that emerges from and is sustained by the cultural meanings of social relationships activated in interaction' (1986:31).

These social relationships and our various personal worlds can alter how we perceive and experience who we are. Because we live our lives in various contexts, for example home, work, social, study, we have different roles within each context which encourages us to forge a sense of personal identity, a self to emphasize above the diverse selves as we are never totally immersed in any one context (Berger *et al*. 1974; Erikson 1968, Thompson & McHugh 2002). Gagnon (1992: 222) suggested that people saw 'the roles they were required to play' as different to who they really were or wanted to be. This reflects the work of Mead (1936) and his proposed structures of 'I', 'me' and 'the generalized other' as individual components of the social-self, each bringing forth a different aspect of the

person depending on the context. This can cause friction between the various identities 'the ambiguity of social identities results in a struggle to reconcile conflicting roles and a confused sense of self' (Adams 1996:206).

Erikson (1968) saw identity formation from the male perspective as the accomplishment of separation, individuation and autonomy. This was developed further by Josselson (1990) who considered the female perspective, how women go through Erikson's identity stages and found that women's view of separation differed to men, women maintain attachment to their families and their identity formation focused on contact with others. This suggests that a woman's identity is linked to a connection with others rather than separation. Jean Baker Miller (1986) reflects the thinking of Josselson (1990), she considered the development of a woman's sense of self and its link to childhood, and how beliefs about gender roles lead to girls being encouraged to look after the emotional needs of others. This, in turn, leads to a woman's sense of self being intrinsically linked to the development and nurturing of relationships. These relationships are not built in isolation, societal influence plays a big part in the perception of women and therefore in their own perceptions of what it is to be a woman. Berger *et al.* (1974:70) reflect this thinking, suggesting our identities are influenced by those around us as we plan what we will do in life and who we will be, our life plans overlap with those closest to us. It is only when women reach 'midlife' that their focus can shift as women re-assess their lives. This 'midlife transition' is a time of re-balancing and re-structuring of priorities, workload and activities 'aligning one's external reality with internal values' (Gordon *et al.* 2002:330).

One of the main changes at this life stage is an increase in family orientation, people attempt to reduce workloads to enhance engagement with the family whilst 're-framing their self-image, exploring new challenges and goals' (Gordon *et al.* 2002:330). One of the main goals is to devote more time to hobbies, to friends and extended family whilst defining their success through intrinsic satisfaction rather than external rewards. This reflects the women respondents in this study who, despite a desire for intrinsic rewards, which is discussed in detail in the findings of this study through the framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985), were prevented from attaining other aspects of

the midlife transition due to the PhD inhibiting free time. It has been highlighted within studies on identity (Berger *et al.* 1974; Burke & Stets 2009; Gagnon 1992; Lawler 2009) that women often have to adapt to different roles that exist between what is referred to as the 'public sphere' or 'social role' of their lives including their roles as 'employee' and 'student' and the 'private sphere' of their lives, the persona they adopt when taking on the role of for example, mother, wife, friend or daughter. These social roles can be explored through a phenomenological approach to understanding the realities or lived experiences of women's lives.

These roles or varying forms of 'self' in relation to PhD study are discussed by Hockey (1994) who identifies the 'intellectual self', 'self and supervision' and the 'departmental self' as fragmented aspects of a PhD student that shape their identity in the first year. He also highlights the solitariness that students feel both socially and intellectually and, reinforcing a common theme occurring throughout studies on doctoral study, he acknowledges a need for more support to aid the transition from undergraduate student to postgraduate research student (Hockey 1994). This raises the issue of identity fragmentation within PhD study. It is an area that is considered with regards to student and academic identity (McCormack & Pamphilon 2000), mothering and student identity (Lynch 2008) and the resulting tension of the 'dual lives' experienced (Brown & Watson). These areas of identity will be further explored within this thesis, utilising Self-Categorization Theory to highlight the numerous communities of practice the women belong to and any subsequent changes due to embarking on a part-time PhD.

The following studies begin to address some of the issues arising from women undertaking study in H.E. They do not all focus on PhD study, but are a useful introduction into some of the themes raised in the narratives of the mothers involved in this research. One of the most cited studies on undergraduate, mature women students is that of Rosalind Edwards (1993) who considered the effects that being a student has on a woman's family and social relationships, how women perceived and negotiated the public and private spheres and how they attempted to separate or connect these whilst managing any tensions experienced as a result. The women interviewed were from different ethnic backgrounds and social

classes, they were aged between twenty-three and forty-six and were mothers in long-term relationships with a man. Her research highlights many issues echoed in similar studies and reflects some of the key themes from this study, the shifting of the women's sense of self, juggling the needs of family and education whilst navigating through the social constraints of societal expectations of gender roles.

> 'While higher education policies and institutions concern themselves with inputs and outputs and privilege disciplines over students, and while the balance of male identity depends on a masculine/feminine demarcation that associates loss of power with loss of masculinity, combining education with family life will never be easy for women' (Edwards 1993:158).

Baxter and Britton (1999) conducted a two-part study of 21 male and female mature students, following their careers from entry in higher education to graduation and beyond through repeat semi-structured interviews. The aim of the first set of interviews was to explore the social and personal transformation involved in becoming a mature student, how and why they had returned as mature students to education. They highlight the benefit of narrative analysis, stating 'in narrating their lives, people are not merely describing them but actively constructing their identities' (p.182). The student's stories were grouped into four narratives, 'struggling against the odds' which was the working-class female narrative, 'unfulfilled potential' was the most common narrative with both male and female participants filling this category, 'credentialism' was the middle-class female narrative and 'self-transformation' was a less class-specific male narrative. The study highlights the difference in gender narratives, suggesting that 'men and women draw on different discourses to represent their experience and to construct a sense of self' (p.190). They argue that men focus on the 'isolated individualized self' whereas women's understanding of self is in relation to others. This reflects the thinking of Josselson (1990) in her work on Erikson's (1980) identity stages, with the woman's identity linked to contact and relationships with others rather than the men's need for separation. It also highlights the importance of the role of self-categorization as a way for women to identify with certain social groups, reflecting the group characteristics in a bid to be recognized as

a legitimate member of the group or community of practice, feeling a sense of belonging. In the second part of the study of mature students (Baxter & Britton 2001) higher education was considered in terms of the effects of identity and the implications for relationships with friends and family. They observed the different effects that returning to education had on the student's domestic lives. Very little changed with the men's domestic circumstances whereas the women all reflected on the difficulty of combining higher education with domestic responsibility.

> 'It involved them devising strategies for managing/juggling their different responsibilities to ensure that their role/identity as a student does not infringe too much on established relationships within the family' (Baxter and Britton 2001:92).

Accounts of husbands being 'supportive' related to them not objecting to the decision to return to education rather than supporting the women in practical terms in relation to the 'domestic responsibilities' mentioned earlier. With regards to higher education and identity, they echo the thinking of Giddens in his theory on 'lifestyle sectors', concluding that 'the process of change is represented as a process of splitting of the self' (Giddens 1991:101).

Janet Parr (2000) used her own experiences as a mature student mother as a basis for her study on the barriers facing mature women when they return to learning. Most had domestic and caring responsibilities, which covered both children and elderly dependents and whilst the experiences are not reflecting doctoral study, the act of embarking on any Higher Education course for women can have similar challenges and results regardless of the level of study. The results of Parr's study demonstrated that due to education the women felt fulfilled, confident, independent and more positive about their self-image, all factors attributing to their overall identity. Parr discusses how the 'narratives of many of the women' astounded and angered her and she argues that the patriarchal structure of society is instrumental in influencing negative aspects of a students' identity.

The assumption that a changing learner identity leads to a shifting class identity is challenged by Brine and Waller (2004) who focused on eight mature working class women students on an access course. All shared an absence of social and economic capital, were aged around thirty and under-educated. The study considered four aspects of risk for the students, risk of academic failure, risk to class identity or personal relationships and economic and material risk, however it is stated that these areas could also be those of opportunity. The interviews were held termly, across the access course and conclusions were drawn based on the women's experiences throughout the year. The results demonstrated that women's perceptions of their learner and class identities were viewed through 'overlapping gendered lenses of families, relationships and occupation' and the risks and opportunities experienced throughout their study were 'fluid, highly complex and continually evolving' (Brine and Waller 2004:110-111).

Heenan (2002) looked at women's reasons for not continuing in higher education after the completion of an access course. Her study consisted of in-depth interviews with 10 mature women students who had completed a Certificate in Women's Studies at the University of Ulster. The women were aged between 28 and 60 and all had children. There were three main obstacles that emerged from the research; caring responsibilities, financial constraints and lack of career advice as the women were not informed of the options available to them at the end of the year. Usually an access course is the first step to entering H.E. and most students complete it with a view to continuing their studies. Despite managing to complete a year of study, the women found the barriers to higher education too much to contend with, these obstacles were on the whole, from the private domain. It was the women's own situations, their domestic responsibilities, caring commitments and financial constraints that prevented their progression. These issues are echoed by Griffiths (2002) who conducted a longitudinal study of 2 groups of student mothers on a PGCE course, one group in 1998/99 and one group in 1990/91. Her aims were to investigate the extent to which women students could draw on their experience as mothers during their training and how they combined public and private spheres, managing domestic responsibilities whilst studying. The conclusions of the study highlighted that the growth and social acceptance of working mothers in society at that

time led to the 1998/99 group adapting to student life a lot quicker, they were confident in their skills and had developed a way of managing their domestic sphere in line with the public sphere. However, both groups still managed the majority of domestic commitments, felt financial pressure and harbored feelings of guilt about spending less time with their children. It is apparent in these studies that the restraints of the private sphere including childcare, heavily influence the way women manage their role as student. In her study titled 'it's like you can't be a whole person, a mother who studies', Pam Green Lister (2003) considers the lifelong learning of mature women students with caring commitments. She highlights the barriers to higher education for mature women carers, using the study by the UK National Advisory Group for Continuing Education as a summary.

> 'The simple physical problems of the time, costs, location and range and accessibility of learning opportunities……. the lack of adequate support for carers and problems of transport…..the absence of childcare, transport arrangements and even course times which may not fit with collecting children from school make difficulties for parents with school age children' (Fryer, 1997: 20).

Whilst the women in these studies are involved in a variety of courses from access programmes to teaching certificates, there is some consistency with regards to the emergent themes identified by each study. There were clear tensions between the public and private sphere as the women pushed for an education whilst managing childcare and familial responsibility, alongside the expected role of being a 'good mother'. The identity of mother is a theme that features strongly in the narratives of the women in this study, the following section will therefore reflect some of the literature around this subject matter in more detail.

4.1.3 Motherhood and Mothering as Identity

One of the core identities of women considered within this study is that of 'mother', it is important therefore to establish the distinctions between the terms relating to mothers used in the current literature around mothers and education: motherhood and mothering. It is also important to understand the role of mother within society today, it is the social categorization of mothers and the expectations of society that can restrict how they behave. In understanding the pressure to conform to fictional dictates of what a 'good mother' is, one can begin to relate these experiences in light of the women then undertaking doctoral study. How they manage the role of mother within societal frameworks that assume motherhood as the 'peak' of a woman's life experience and how they overcome the 'everyday guilt' (Elvin-Nowak 1999) to embark on a PhD is something that will be explored within this research, in a bid to truly understand the experiences and perceptions of women in this position.

Historically women were framed by society as being innately maternal and would be fully responsible for managing the private domestic sphere (Chodorow 1978). Rich (1986) defines motherhood as an experience and an institution, considering the positive values associated with being a mother alongside the often isolating, thankless work being a mother entails. She identifies the 'institution of motherhood' as a socially constructed phenomenon that incorporates endless tasks that mothers endure on a daily basis which she refers to as the 'dogma that says she is a mother, first, last, always'. She highlights how mothers dream of 'relinquishing her sanity so she can take care of herself' (Rich 1986:279). This societal expectation for a woman to put others before herself is defined by Lemkau and Landau (1986) as 'selfless syndrome'. This theory suggests that a woman's sense of self is determined by putting other's needs before their own despite the conflict that this often causes. Due to the cultural norms of women being selfless, doing things for themselves is seen as selfish which induces feelings of guilt and anxiety (Lemkau & Landau 1986:232).

Rothman (1994:140) viewed motherhood as an institution shaped by patriarchy, capitalism and technology, with each contributing to the construction of a pattern 'of both a curtain and a cage'. This is reflected in the work of Marshall (1991) in her study of parenting manuals, where the childcare responsibilities are seen as being the mothers rather than the fathers. Women are expected to comply with societal visions of motherhood and accept that being a mother is 'the ultimate fulfilment for women' (Marshall 1991:68). Ideology about women and the treatment of them in society derives from women's roles being familial, embedded in social interaction and personal relationships that define them as wives and mothers (Chodorow 1978:178).

The thinking of motherhood as a site for both oppression and power is reflected by Short (2005) who suggests that due to the complex representations of power and oppression highlighted by academics. There is no clear definition of the power expressed within the institution of motherhood, however mothering, the term that often refers to the women's experiences of looking after their child, is seen as a positive term, defined by O'Reilly *et al.* (2005:6) as 'the commitment to the nurturing of children'. This is supported by Phoenix *et al.* (1991:6) who describe mothering as 'the intensity and emotional closeness of the idealized mother-child relationship'. Both focus on the act of being a mother as opposed to the institution of motherhood. Gilligan (1982) and Miller (1976/1986) both see women's power as separate from patriarchal power, reinforcing the ideology of mothering as a positive, empowering experience rather than the more negative, oppressive connotations intimated by the term motherhood.

> 'Whilst the term 'mothering' is deemed as having many positive attributes, psychologists generally argue that mothers are the central figures in their children's lives, as carers and socialisers but they are rarely considered as having an existence of their own or a perspective on what they do as mothers. This results in definitions of 'good' mothering concerned with children's 'needs' often to the exclusion of the mother's views of themselves and their own needs' (Woollett & Phoenix 1991:28).

‘Contemporary variations of what is deemed a ‘bad’ mother range from welfare mothers of home alone children, lesbian mothers and lone mothers, whilst those who give up jobs to look after their families are seen as ‘good’ mothers’ (Woodward 2002:132). ‘A woman who is a mother and employed outside the home is called a working mother. A man who is a father and employed outside the home is called employed’ (Gilbert & Brownson 1998:437). There are frequent debates in the media about the rights and wrongs of mothers going back to work after the birth of their children (McRobbie 2013). The benefits of working are often listed as positives for women, such as increased self-esteem, financial autonomy, confidence and social enhancement, with the positive aspects for the children linked to the image of the mother, as a ‘good role model’ demonstrating women can work and be a parent. The construction of the stay-at-home mother scenario is seen as a major positive for the child, with the benefits for women simply being with her child (Orgad & De Benedictus 2015). This reinforces the guilt many mothers feel when returning to work as they are seen to be putting the benefits for them of working over what is perceived by society as what is best for the child. This leads to women being caught between being the ‘ideal worker’ and the ‘ideal mother’ (Stone & Lovejoy 2004).

There is increasing conflict between personal fulfilment and the responsibilities of motherhood (Badinter 2011; Rueschemeyer 1981) and this difficulty to reconcile the two means ‘the reality of most working mothers’ lives is a combination of the prosaic and the heroic’ (Millar 2009:197). This conflict between role expectation then puts additional pressure on women (Ladge & Greenberg 2015) as they strive for goals and challenges that enable them to grow as individuals ‘discrimination based on gender can constrain women’s efforts to redefine their roles’ (Gilbert & Brownson 1998:435) leading to frustration and often a reluctance to continue with their personal goal towards self-fulfilment. Weaver & Usher (1997) and Barkin & Wisner (2013) identify how, in the transition to motherhood, many women feel they lose some of their identity. This process of ‘maternal transition’ (Darvill *et al.* 2008) experienced by women becoming mothers leads to changes in their ‘self-concept’ as they experience feeling a lack of control over their lives. This lack of autonomy and control is something described by the women in

this study, the PhD was acknowledged by them as a vehicle to regain and re-balance the self-concept, igniting feelings of control back into their lives (Beck 1992).

The unwritten rule is that for women to be good mothers their primary focus should always be the mother role, ahead of all other roles and responsibilities and to deviate from this then brings in to question her ability and dedication to the role of mother (Phoenix *et al.* 1991:196). This reflects a list of criteria for 'good mothers' identified by Bepko and Krestan (1990:9) as 'the Code of Goodness'. This code suggests that women should be unselfish, competent without complaint, put others first and remain in control. One may argue that this code is dated and is no longer wielded as a doctrine for mothering success yet Bepko and Krestan highlight that the reality of women's experiences of chronic guilt, as they are torn between conflicting choices identify that the mandate to be 'good' still operates (Bepko & Krestan 1990:14). In the context of this study, these concepts of how 'good' mothers should behave leads to guilt which can be a huge obstacle when studying for a PhD as the women struggle to reconcile the needs of the PhD as a priority in relation to the needs of their children. This means they cannot prioritize their research and commit to the level of work required.

The role of worker or employee, outside of the domestic sphere, is often impeded by what Crosby *et a*l. (2004) refer to as 'the maternal wall', as mothers 'pay the price' for having children in terms of 'employment security, income and promotion' (Baker 2010:223), a constraint as a direct result of having children that women without children do not experience (Abendruth, Huffman & Treas 2014).

> 'Gender stereotypes regarding women's low 'agency' or competence create situations in which women are devalued, discredited and offered fewer opportunities than men. Mothers in particular are systematically disadvantaged by unexamined assumptions' (Crosby *et al.* 2004:679).

Dominant cultural perceptions of what it means to be both a 'good mother' and a 'good student' cause conflict that leads women to downplay the student role outside of academia

and to do the same with the maternal role in an academic context. This 'academic and maternal invisibility' prevent integration of their 'dual identities' in an attempt to adhere to the social constructions of these roles (Lynch 2008:595). This notion of guilt is addressed by Elvin-Nowak (1999:73) who notes that whilst there is no generally accepted definition of the term 'guilt', it is something that most people have experience of and is linked to responsibility and action. She notes that guilt arises when a woman is 'unable to live up to her responsibility due to conflicts between internal and external demands and the conflict between one's own needs and those of others'. These issues are a common occurrence and are classed by Elvin-Nowak as 'everyday guilt' (1999:78). This 'everyday guilt' is reinforced by the social ideal of 'good mothers', an area of conflict and stress for women who work as they balance both domestic and professional roles (Guendouzi 2006). She suggests that domestic responsibilities can overwhelm a woman's sense of individuality and that alternative models of motherhood need to be developed to better reflect the reality of modern women's lives (Guendouzi 2006:907).

This section has raised issues concerning the role of mother and the impact of that role on a woman. The process of becoming a mother leads women through 'maternal transition' (Darvill *et al.* 2008) whereby they experience a change in their self-concept. This shift in identity is addressed by some women in the form of a new challenge to regain a sense of autonomy and competence. In the case of the women in this study, this challenge took the form of a part-time PhD. The new challenge however can and did cause conflict between role expectation and the subsequent 'everyday guilt' (Elvin-Nowak 1999) felt by the women due to the 'motherhood myth' (Rotkirch *et al.* 2009) that they should not prioritise their own needs and instead, should focus on being 'selfless' (Lemkau & Landau 1986). This lead to the women in this study struggling to reconcile their role of mother with that of student. Thus it would seem that embarking on a part-time PhD puts pressure on mothers as they try to balance both roles. The adoption of the role of mother, the subsequent confusion of identity that often follows and the quest for a reinstatement of a previous self is an area that will be further explored in the findings of this study.

The role that appears to cause most conflict with the mother identity is that of student. The academic role is often new to the women in this study and brings with it challenges as the women are exposed to new procedures, new knowledge and skills. In recognising the growing prominence of the academic identity in some of the women's lives, the literature around women in academia is of relevance to the understanding of the issues raised in the women's narratives around their experiences of participating in an academic community of practice. The following literature highlights some of the key thoughts around women in academia.

4.1.4 Academic Identity

This study is focussed on the part-time doctoral student experience. The issue of a blurred identity between the mother identity and the academic identity of research student is prominent in the respondents' lived-experience of studying whilst caring for children. Whilst conducting the fieldwork for this study it became apparent that academia and academic identity were relevant to the research as many of the women were already working in an academic role or aspired to work in Higher Education after completion of their PhD. The academic role is therefore key to the study due to the Higher Education context and the career trajectory it offers doctoral students. All of the mothers in this past study are over 21 and are therefore considered to be mature students within the realms of academia. Baxter and Britton (2001) define mature students as 'a group of people who are attempting to use education to shape their own biographies and identities in a reflexive way' (2001:88) however mature students face tensions between their roles as they are 'caught up in a constant balancing act between wanting to study, meeting domestic responsibilities and needing to earn money (Reay *et al.* 2002:10).

As is highlighted in much of the research into the structures of Higher Education, the dominant social construction of the academic in Higher Education has always been white, middle class (Aguirre, 2000; Alfred 1997). 'The ivory towers of academia are dominated by a male hierarchy and a male view of the world'. (Merrill 1999:42) Much of the

literature echoes the view that the Higher Education culture impedes female academic advancement (Winchester & Browning 2015), suggesting that women are located in the 'ivory basement' due to their alignment with 'academic housekeeping and poorly funded research areas' (Groombridge 2004: 143). This is supported by Forster (2000:325) who identifies that there are 'ingrained socio-cultural and structural barriers to the progression of women in academia who are further handicapped by an organisational culture that emphasises publication records over other criteria of work performance'. It has been identified by a number of researchers that women make career sacrifices for their family by taking responsibility for the domestic sphere, particularly childcare (Abendroth, Huffman & Treas 2014; Lindsay & Maher 2014; Treas & Drobnic 2010; Wattis, Standing & Yerkes 2013). Studies that have argued how having young children can impact negatively on a woman's academic career, include Wolfinger *et al.* 2008, Evans & Grant 2009, Morrison *et a*l. 2011, Baker 2012a and Castaneda & Isgro 2013. Although these studies are concerned with female academics employed in universities, there are wider implications for future academics and doctoral students considering a career in academia who have young families and are not recognised by the institution as requiring a different approach. If the institution does not recognise the requirements of female academic staff with childcare responsibilities, it is reasonable to assume they do not recognise the needs of PhD students in the same situation, which is therefore an important area to be explored further within this research.

Organizational gendering occurs through structures and processes that maintain a gendered division of labour, with men in the highest positions of the hierarchy (Sarikakis 2003; Wall 2008). There are also issues of female faculty members feeling marginalized and having lower salaries than male colleagues (Wolf-Wendel *et al.* 2007:259). This reflects the work of Leonard (2001:44) who highlights the work mainly done by women, as dealing with the whole student whilst the men deal with just the students' minds. Whilst this statement reflects the role of women as more nurturing and attuned to the emotional needs of a student, it is perhaps not a true and fair reflection of all male academics, many of whom demonstrate an interest in student welfare outside the classroom walls. However, it does contextualise women's self-perception of their role in academia.

These views are supported by Kuhn *et al.* (2009:237) who refer to the 'medieval structures and traditionally juvenile attitudes towards women' in Higher Education, which make navigating a career in academia on top of being a mother difficult, especially in light of the 'myriad of obstacles erected by academic culture'. These 'obstacles' are outlined by Gardner (2013) whose work on the retention of female academics underpins existing studies that identify women are paid less and promoted less (August & Waltman 2004), have heavier teaching loads (Austin & Gamson 1883) and more administrative responsibilities (Rosser & O'Neil Lane 2002) in addition to having a lack of supportive policies for familial responsibilities. The notion of obstacles is addressed by de Welde & Laursen (2011) who identify female academics as having to navigate a glass obstacle course which 'captures the unequal gendered processes at work in women's graduate careers, including exclusion from the Old Boys' Club, outright sexism, a lack of women role models and difficult work-life choices. These obstacles are glass because they are often implicit and unanticipated' (de Welde & Laursen 2011:571). The concept of 'glass' is utilised in Peterson's metaphor 'the glass cliff' (2015:1) describing Swedish women appointed to 'precarious leadership roles in problematic organisational circumstances'. These roles have an increased risk of failure and have less value in the organisation as a whole. This suggests that, even when women do break through the glass ceiling and are promoted to senior positions in the institution, the roles they are appointed to are less desirable and often less sought after by those seeking advancement.

Work-life integration and a balance of family/work is a key aspect of faculty well-being according to McCoy *et al.* (2013) who identify women as having a lower well-being and negative perception of environmental conditions than men. Many women feel there is a lack of connection in academia between the public and private sphere and therefore the public and private roles they fulfil.

> 'Women who have family obligations while studying are not following the socially prescribed script of a traditional graduate student. People who attend study part-time, who take time out of their academic career to focus on family or

> who give priority to the needs of their children are not defined as being as committed as other academics' (Gouthro 2002:9).

As there is little acknowledgement in academia of the two combining, there is a presumption by academic institutions that women can simply leave their personal lives 'at the door' (Wall 2008). This leads to women feeling pressure to ignore the tensions between the two worlds they inhabit despite the huge impact familial responsibility can have on a woman's working life (Laurijssen & Glorieux 2013). Gouthro (2002) argues for the acknowledgement of the importance of women's home life experiences. She highlights the need for society to re-evaluate what is currently considered 'important' work, arguing that the work for familial care should be identified as crucial for an individual's sense of identity and should not be devalued. She considers the need for education to be more 'life-centred' (2002:13), validating the work women do outside of academia in their 'motherwork' (2002:14). Due to the demands of the two 'greedy institutions' (Edwards 1993:63) families and academia, women are placed under enormous pressure to adhere to the conflicting requirements of each (Wattis, Standing & Yerkes 2013). The reality for many female academics is that they will be at a disadvantage because of gendered differences in responsibilities and life experiences (Gouthro *et al.* 2006). This collision between responsibility for childcare and academic life can result in career plans being affected (Probert 2005). This has been highlighted as a concern for women who perceive that having children during their postgraduate studies could impede their studies and affect their future employability (Svanberg *et al.* 2006). These concerns can lead to less women considering progression into academia as a viable career option: 'perceived incompatibility between motherhood and academia has had a notable effect on the consideration female postgraduate students give an academic career' (Crabb & Ekberg 2013:12).

Women face greater expectations from society to be the primary care givers for their children, yet are penalized professionally when they do take career breaks (Cech & Blair-Loy 2014; Ledwith & Manfredi 2000; Mayer & Tikka 2008). Research from the Lawyers Slater & Gordon (2014) found a third of managers would rather employ a man in his 20s

or 30s than a woman of the same age for fear of maternity leave and that six in ten mothers felt side-lined from the moment they revealed they were pregnant. The data, used by the Labour Party to argue for shared parental leave legislation, also suggests that up to 50,000 women had been forced out of the workplace after taking time out for maternity leave. The challenges faced by female professionals are echoed by Pyke (2013:448) who identifies the non-traditional route of many female academics who do not 'conform to the traditional male model of academic career progression' and cites interrupted careers to have children and unequal responsibility for childcare as major hurdles for women's career aspirations in academia. This is supported by the Equality Challenge Unit's annual data report, which highlights the gender divide in academia suggesting that more than three times as many men as women hold professorships, that there are more than twice as many male department heads and there are still only 35 female vice-chancellors out of a possible 170 positions. These data also indicate that there is a 13.6% median pay gap between male and female academics which paints a bleak picture for female doctoral students considering a career in academia. 'Female academics find it disproportionately difficult to juggle their career and parenthood. Fewer professors, lecturers and researchers at some leading universities are taking maternity leave than in 2010' (The Guardian 2014) this is echoed by Holstrom & Holstrom (1974:17) who argue a need for a new 'climate of expectation' due to the increasing participation of women with children in the labour force. Women who assume a higher proportion of childcare are more likely to experience career breaks or engage in part-time or casual employment rather than committing to full-time contracts (Cech & Blair-Loy 2014; Crabb & Ekberg 2013; Dick 2010). Finding new ways of managing the academic infrastructure and process is a key necessity to accommodate the non-traditional student seeking academic career advancement. As reflected by Johnson *et al.*, individual women's desires to be autonomous scholars have pushed them to find ways of imagining themselves as such figures outside the current, dominant cultural representations (Johnson *et al.* 2000:145).

Faculty women in the US are less likely to be married and to have young children according to a study by Mason & Goulden (2004a). Nearly half the women delayed becoming a parent because of their career and whilst both men and women highlighted

there were challenges combining work and family life, the women identified more sacrifices and compromises relating to both career and family whilst men felt they had made no sacrifices in these areas. This forms part of the literature around the lack of support for women wanting to combine an academic career with raising a family (Wolf-Wendel & Ward 2006). McCormack & Pamphilon in their work on the female academic's experience of postgraduate study consider what they describe as the 'multiple and contradictory roles' of women as both academic and postgraduate student. They highlight that the women's experiences are both individual and collective in nature and describe one woman's experience as being mirrored in the stories of five other respondents, her journey consisting of three phases: 'being balanced, becoming unbalanced and rebalancing' (McCormack & Pamphilon 2000:194). This suggests that during the process of PhD study, the women experience contradictory feelings about themselves and the PhD. Their identity as student is often considered as peripheral to their more consistent identities of mother or employee (Watts 2008). This section has highlighted some areas of discussion around the key roles of the women in this study, those of mother and student. Through the use of SCT the issues raised in the women's narratives around contradictory identities will be explored further to provide an understanding of the impact of the PhD on their identity and subsequently their lives.

4.2 Introduction - Motivations and Experiences of women

As a number of studies have suggested, part-time students tend to undertake research for personal development rather than solely for academic career advancement (Deem & Brehony 2000; Pratt *et a*l. 1999). Indeed, there are a number of motivational factors that appear to influence a woman's decision to embark on a PhD. Career development, thirst for knowledge, need for a sense of accomplishment or challenge, self-esteem, and the desire to do something outside of the realm of domesticity are key motivational themes that are illustrated in the following studies on women and Higher Education, to explore existing perspectives on factors influencing motivation.

The motivations of part-time taught postgraduate and research students were considered by Tight (1992) who found, perhaps not surprisingly, career development to be the main single reason for undertaking study. This is echoed by Clark and Anderson (1992) who, after surveying 622 students from one institution, found the main motivations for study were career development alongside subject interest. These studies incorporated taught postgraduate courses that attract students interested in career-focused progression, they do not provide a clear picture of motivations by gender unlike the following studies which suggest women embark on education for more than career development. Pascal & Cox (1993) interviewed 43 women at two higher education institutions in the mid 80's, re-interviewing half of them ten years later. They identify the motivations of the women as linked to a search for a new identity and a need for independence from domestic roles. The theme of identity and the renewal of self is important as it is reflected not only in the existing literature, but also in the findings of this study, suggesting that the role of part-time doctoral education for women provides more than a qualification and a research specific focus, the motivation for study comes from the fact that it provides the key to their own enhanced perception of self.

Whilst the mode of study is different, the issue of identity as a motivating factor for study is echoed in Leonard's (1994) research on access to Higher Education for mature women students. She interviewed 23 women on undergraduate degrees about their motivations

for returning to study, their experiences of university life and the effects studying had on their relationships and domestic situation. She highlights the key motivations of the mature women students as wanting to change or enhance their careers or 'personal life', with a desire to improve self-confidence and challenge themselves and concludes that the 'greatest drawback mature students may face is the patriarchal attitude of the marital partner, and their continued adherence to ideologies of gender stereotyping which results in women having to engage in an endless juggling act of trying to balance home, family and university commitments' (Leonard 1994:176). Leonard's findings reflect many of the difficulties facing women wishing to undertake higher education alongside raising children. These difficulties are often discussed in terms of attempting to gain a balance between the differing priorities in the women's lives. The issue of balance or 'juggling' is reflected by the work of Smith (1996) who interviewed 20 mature women returners to education on a variety of courses in an attempt to understand how their experiences of education are shaped by their lives in the private sphere. The results of the study revealed a similar outcome to Leonard (1994), with the lives of women returners symbolizing 'a perpetual 'juggling act' between the demands of family and education' (Smith 1996:58). This raises an interesting point around motivation, as despite this 'juggling act' that has been demonstrated in the literature to impede a woman's progression in her pursuit of education, the women in this study all maintain the motivation to embark on and continue with their doctorates. Understanding what keeps women with children engaged in doctoral study despite their various and often conflicting demands leads to questions around what it is that motivates them. Motivation is therefore an important factor when exploring the experiences of women undertaking part-time PhD study and will be discussed further in the findings of this study.

A study in Australia considered the motivations of mature female student graduates with children, from 4 different Universities, comparing those who completed with those who discontinued their studies. Their findings identified that motivations were similar for both groups but life circumstance led to discontinuance, despite the fact that it was those often difficult life circumstances that motivated many to return to education in the first place (Scott *et al.* 1998). There is a suggestion here of conflict in the women's situations as their

desire for education is stifled by the situation that often stimulated their drive to attend university. This issue of progression being impeded is reflected in a study by Johnson and Robson (1999). They conducted research over two consecutive years investigating how women experience the transition to programmes of professional Higher Education, specifically social work and health education. Whilst the mode of study was not PhD and therefore not directly linked to this research, the findings reflect issues common to many women embarking on a course in Higher Education, anxiety, continuity, ability and belonging are understandable areas of change as the women navigate their way through a process previously unknown to them. It could be argued that these themes can be a necessary part of education, leading to a 'reconstruction of the self' (Brown 2009:4) which is echoed by respondents in a study by Peters (2000) 'I realize that I was living out dreams that my closed society had imposed on me. I took this course to assist me in realizing what I truly am' (Peters 2000: 40). This suggests that it is only through the process of embarking on study in H.E, regardless of how uncomfortable and alien the experience that women emerge with a renewed sense of self. This feeling of becoming an 'improved' version of oneself is reflected in Peter's conclusions of the study. 'The real gain is the sense of achievement and of belonging to the academic community, of being someone with status in the eyes of family, children and society' (Peters 2000: 45). This further supports the argument about the role of identity in the motivations of women undertaking part-time PhD study, the need for a change in their current identity and perception of self by others is a key aspect of their motivation.

This need for mothers to be happy and fulfilled is something Elvin-Novak & Thomsson (2001) suggest is vital for the well-being of a woman's children, however Guendouzi (2006:902) argues that this sets up tension between two oppositions, as being accessible for your children and fulfilling your own needs can be difficult to sustain. This dilemma of 'self and other' (Field Belenky *et al.* 1997:76) is a key theme in the experiences of the women respondents who all reflected on the anxiety of either denying the self to take care of others or prioritizing their own needs for autonomy and competence at the risk of their child's needs being neglected. The women therefore showed remarkable resilience to continue with their studies despite the conflicting demands on their time and the guilt

inducing reflections of the 'perfect mother' image relayed by the media. 'Those who struggle successfully against adversity are often possessed of remarkable motivation and commitment' (Wright & Cochrane 2000:192). Thus it seems, regardless of the level of study undertaken, women are being recognized as experiencing Higher Education as a source of tension between their roles in the public and private sphere.

The tension felt by women attempting to fulfill roles of student and mother is reflected in research by Stephanie White (2008), who considered the experiences of mature student mothers on a postgraduate teacher-training course. There were 6 women whose ages ranged from 22 to 49 years, all with dependent children. Although these women were not doctoral candidates, a number of key themes were found which appear in many studies concerning mature women students. The first focused on the women's motivation for wanting to become primary school teachers. The reasons revolved around issues of 'self-esteem', 'wanting to be more than just a mum' and 'to move beyond the boundaries of their domestic roles' (2008:163). This desire to be 'more' and do 'more' is a re-occurring thread in research on women studying and is an area that will be explored further in this study. The impact studying had on their families had positive aspects such as the women being able to relate to their child's school experiences, and negative effects surrounding the children's demand for time at home and the guilt and anguish associated with the woman moving out of her traditional role. These negative aspects highlight issues arising from trying to navigate the roles of mother and student as they 'juggle the emotional and physical needs of their children and their responsibilities as students' (2008:167). This is a common thread in the literature reviewed thus far, and is something echoed by Butcher (2015) who identified the motivations of enhanced employability skills, enjoyment and intellectual change in conflict with external demands from work and family.

Each study discussed, identifies either areas of motivation, implications for the women's sense of identity or addresses the challenges facing women managing familial responsibilities in addition to educational demands. The studies begin to build a picture of a path to education that is not as straightforward as perhaps a traditional, full-time student may experience, and questions are raised around why the women continue, despite the

difficulties and what their subsequent experiences are. These questions are reflected on by the women in this study and their interpretations of their own experiences provide detailed and insightful perspectives on the role of education in their lives. The following table summarizes the studies addressing the factors influencing motivation.

4.2.1 Summary of motivating factors influencing women embarking on higher education

Author	**Sample**	**Motivation for study**
Tight (1992)	Part-time postgraduate students	Career development
Pascal & Cox (1993)	43 full-time mature women undergraduates	Improve career prospects Search for new identity Need for independence
Leonard (1994)	23 mature women undergraduates	Improve self-confidence Challenge themselves Enhance personal life Change career
Scott *et al.* (1998)	287 female mature graduates with children	Discover new roles Remediate life circumstance Develop an identity outside that of wife and mother

Peters (2000)	Mature women returners	A challenge To realize their potential To make changes in their lives
White (2008)	6 mature women students with children aged 25-49	Move beyond boundaries of the domestic role Enhance self-esteem Improve themselves
Butcher (2015)	Part-time students	Employability Enjoyment Intellectual challenge

4.2.2 Motivation Theory

A key factor in maintaining momentum during the process of part-time PhD study is that of motivation. In searching for a theoretical explanation for the women's internal drive to undertake PhD study alongside their other roles and responsibilities, a number of motivation theories were considered. As highlighted in the literature (Demb 2012; Leonard 1991; Phillips & Pugh 1998; Salmon 1992), there are numerous challenges facing doctoral candidates yet despite the obstacles, 4,715 people enrolled for part-time PhD study in 2009/10 compared to 18,075 enrolling full-time (HEFCE 2011). The following three social cognitive theories of motivation are all linked to academic settings within the literature, each has been explored to assess the relevance to the women in this study.

Achievement Goal Theory is concerned with students' rationale for engaging in academic work, their perceptions of their ability to succeed. The theory suggests that there are two

types of goal, mastery or intrinsic goals that lead to personal competence in skills and knowledge, and performance or extrinsic goals which tend to be competitive and lead to a desire to outperform others (Shibley Hyde & Kling 2001), however mastery goals are said to have a stronger outcome than performance goals when in an educational setting (Senko, Hulleman & Harackiewicz 2011). The theory considers both a rationale for pursuing a task and a goal or target by which success of performance can be measured. Setting goals can help individuals evaluate their performance but they do not provide an understanding as to why they want to undertake the task. In assuming goals are cognitive and individuals are fully aware of the motivation for their actions, achievement goal theory does not consider motivation to be 'more deeply held needs or motives' (Pintrich 2000:96). As a result of the focus on perceptions of competence, the theory can leave gaps in understanding of motivation, especially in 'achievement contexts where individuals strive to have choice in their actions and feel affiliated to others' (Ntoumanis 2001:400). Whilst this addresses the rationale for motivation, it does not consider the quality and effects of intrinsic motivation. It is suggested that the elements of mastery represent a need for increased competence and need for a challenge, an area very relevant to the women in this study, the performance goal however, is very much focussed on the need to demonstrate an ability to others, to prove self-worth (Wolters 2004) and outperform others as a way to boost one's ability in the eyes of others (Covington 2000). This need to prove oneself is not reflected in the findings of this study, it is something that is not linked to the women in any way as they avoided telling people about their doctorate rather than using it as a goal to demonstrate ability. The achievement goal theory is therefore not as relevant to the women in this study as there is too much focus on goals rather than a consideration of the need for relatedness and the experience of the student and research has demonstrated that part-time doctoral students are not goal oriented, instead considering the PhD as a process of self-fulfilment (Deem & Brehony 2000; Schmidt & Umans 2014)

Self-Efficacy Theory is a concept also linked to motivation, considering how a student's own beliefs in their efficacy to master academic activity can determine their motivation and aspirations. 'The belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura 1997:3). It is less focussed on what skills

and abilities individuals possess, instead considering what individuals believe they can do (Bong & Skaalvik 2003). Perceived self-efficacy can influence the level of challenge people set themselves and their performance in that challenge (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons 1992). In an academic context, self-efficacy relates to an individuals' belief that they can perform academic tasks successfully (Schunk 1991) suggesting there requires an inherent confidence in their academic ability. 'Knowledge, skill and prior attainments are often poor predictors of achievement because the beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and about the outcome of their efforts, powerfully influence the ways in which they will behave' (Pajares 1996:543). This thinking does not reflect the women in this study who, despite feelings of self-doubt and a lack of faith in their ability, continued to study for the PhD. They did not feel confident in their academic ability, indeed, many of them talked openly about their lack of self-belief. Their lack of self-efficacy was not a deterring factor in their approach to the goal of attaining a PhD, indeed it was despite their lack of self-belief that they continued. What was apparent when listening to the women respondents talk about their experiences of PhD study, was the lack of self-efficacy they all had. They were full of self-doubt and it appeared that self-belief was not a driving force behind their decision to undertake a PhD. Schunk (1991) also argues that academic self-efficacy is enhanced based on the knowledge of others. 'Observing similar peers perform a task conveys to observers that they too are capable of accomplishing it' (Schunk 1991:208). Again this does not concur with the experience of the women in this study as they did not come into contact with many PhD students, their lifestyles and external commitments meant that the social aspect of discussing work with other PhD students was not part of their experience.

Whilst it has been argued that heightened self-efficacy sustains motivation (Bandura 1993; Schunk 1991; Zimmerman 1995) the women in this study sustained motivation for the PhD despite experiencing self-doubt and low levels of self-efficacy, suggesting their drive to continue with the PhD is more than a task oriented motivation or a drive to succeed due to self-efficacy. Their motivation was from a deeper, internal desire to achieve more from their current situations and identities, which suggests an intrinsic motivation, more in keeping with the theoretical framework of self-determination theory. Self-Efficacy

Theory also reflects three other processes including cognitive, affective and selection. These are not deemed key to the experiences of the respondents in this study and therefore, for the purpose of this study, whilst it could be argued that self-efficacy is relevant when considering the women's self-belief and motivation, it will not be used as a framework to further understand the women's experiences. Both Self-Efficacy Theory and Achievement Goal Theory place emphasis on students' beliefs about their abilities (Urdan & Maehr 1995) whilst the focus with the following theory to be discussed, Self-Determination Theory, is on the student's need to feel autonomous and challenged, their perception of whether they can achieve their goals is not the main focus of the theory.

As Rigby *et al.* (1992) emphasise, learning is a natural psychological process, an activity that individuals engage in spontaneously throughout their lives. The study of motivation explores the needs of an 'organism' and the processes that satisfy those needs (Deci & Ryan 1985). Intrinsic motivation considers that individuals gain rewards from activity through the experience of the undertaking of an activity rather than the end product or external reward. Self-Determination Theory is based on the idea of intrinsic motivation, doing an activity for the satisfaction, for the positive feeling associated with 'exercising and extending one's capacities rather than for a separable consequence' (Ryan & Deci 2000:3). Intrinsic motivation is affected by three specific psychological needs. The first is autonomy, the need to feel in control of one's actions, the second is competence, feeling that you have a certain level of ability and the last one is relatedness, needing to connect with others. Self-determination theory was identified as a meaningful framework to further explore these issues

Rather than focusing on the amount of motivation an individual may have for an activity, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is concerned with the type or quality of motivation experienced. The distinction in Self-Determination Theory is between autonomous motivation whereby the individual has identified the activity as having value, and controlled motivation which considers external rewards or punishments as drivers for action, directing people to think and behave in particular ways (Deci & Ryan 2008). Self-Determination Theory does not consider social context to be a key factor in motivation,

instead identifying individual need for competence as a crucial element of what drives individuals to engage in certain tasks. Undertaking tasks for autonomous reasons can elicit a demonstration of higher perceived competence and interest which is further enhanced by a supervisor or teacher supporting autonomous self-regulation (Black & Deci 2000; Niemiec & Ryan 2009). One aspect of support is that of verbal rewards: positive verbal feedback can enhance intrinsic motivation and therefore improve the student focus and ultimately the perception of their ability (Deci *et al.* 2001). It is worth considering the wider context in which students undertake PhD study as the social environment can have a big impact on the intrinsic motivation of students. Social context that supports competence and autonomy are considered to facilitate positive outcomes in relation to intrinsic motivation (Deci *et a*l. 1991; Deci *et al.* 1996; Rigby *et al.* 1992). 'The intrinsic needs for competence and self-determination motivate an ongoing process of seeking and attempting to conquer optimal challenges. People seek situations that interest them and require the use of their creativity and resourcefulness' (Deci & Ryan 1985:32). Within an educational context, self-determination theory suggests that fulfilling these criteria instils in students an interest in learning and a confidence in their own abilities. The self-directed process focuses on performing an activity for its own sake rather than for an external reward. This autonomous learning seems to echo the approach taken by the women in this study and raises the question of why they undertake additional demands on their time when they are already managing what Hochschild (1989) describes as the 'second shift'. It would seem that self-determination theory emphasises the benefits of education based on an internal desire to feel good about the process rather than requiring a tangible or recognizable reward at the end. Each element of Self-Determination Theory, autonomy, competence and relatedness, reflect the experiences evidenced by the women's narratives. The theory provides a clear framework to develop the theme of motivation, considering the areas that the women established as key to their rationale for embarking on a part-time PhD and maintaining their engagement with it despite the obstacles. In light of the women's experiences of PhD study, self-determination theory is the most appropriate framework to understand their motivations for part-time PhD study.

4.2.3 Factors influencing completion rates

There have been various studies considering the rates of doctoral completion, with the term completion meaning in this instance, 'the submission of a thesis for PhD assessment, followed by a successful PhD viva (oral examination) around two months later. A student would then be awarded their PhD by a higher education institution's (HEI's) Board of Studies or equivalent' (HEFCE 2007). Many factors have been considered to contribute to the timely completion of a PhD including the supervisory relationship, academic infrastructure, mode of study, clear research preparation, funding and familial responsibility (Becher *et al.* 1994; Maher *et al.* 2004; Philips & Pugh 1998; Rudd 1985; Wright & Cochrane 2000). Whilst it is difficult to isolate these factors, it is acknowledged that they can have an impact on a student's path to completion.

Lenz (1997) looked at factors that influenced the non-traditional-aged (over 35) woman's completion of a doctorate, specifically their relationships with others. She conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven women, nine of whom had children. Her findings demonstrated the importance of good support, both from family and peers and from supervisors. These factors are echoed by Kember (1999) who, when considering the coping strategies and mechanisms that allowed some part-time students in Hong Kong to cope with conflicting demands whilst others dropped out, highlights support from friends, family and colleagues, sacrifice and negotiation of social roles and status as three mechanisms employed by students that succeed in part-time study and complete their doctorate. Support was a key factor in the findings of Wright (2003) who looked at postgraduate research students' experiences in relation to completion rates at one university with full and part-time students. Factors leading to successful completion were highlighted with suggestions of progress reviews, training and initiatives and a prioritisation of support and guidance to enhance a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation (Wright 2003).

In her study considering the relationships between students and academic staff, alongside factors such as age and dependents on the duration of study and completion, Sarikakis

(2003) presents the findings of an international pilot study into the experiences of doctoral students in universities across the World. She surveyed 30 female and 22 male respondents from 11 different countries and explored 3 main aspects of doctoral life, formal work, general guidance and a sense of belonging and self-perception. She argues that 'age and family responsibilities have a negative impact on female Ph.D. students' completion timeframe' that there are 'strong indications of gender inequity' in the process and that 'overt or subtle sexism in the academe harm not only individuals but also educational cultures' (Sarikakis 2003:41).

Leonard, Becker & Coate (2004) also investigated the circumstances within which research students started and completed their doctorates and how they subsequently used their studies. The sample was from PhD and EdD students from one UK institution who had completed 2, 5 and 10 years ago. Over half of the respondents had children living at home and many revealed 'a continuing gendered domestic division of labour and obligation, with women responsible for most of the routine physical and emotional care for the children' (2004:376) which impacted on the completion rates of these students. The study highlights the lack of research looking at the doctoral student experience and concludes that the students' accounts of the doctorate 'focus at least as much on what they got from their studies emotionally and intellectually as on what they gained vocationally' (2004:384). This consideration of the student experience will be explored further during this thesis.

Gardner (2008) considered doctoral students' retention and completion at two universities in the USA. Students with negative experiences included women, older students, students with children and those studying part-time. Issues such as a male dominated environment, dealing with sexist attitudes, lack of integration with peers, isolation and balancing time and priorities were key to the negative experience of these groups and the impact on completion. Acknowledging the challenges faced by these individual groups, this thesis will consider those who fit many of the criteria, women with children studying for a doctorate part-time. The separate issues raised by Gardner are reflected in the results of

the research as common experiences to the women in this study and will be discussed further during the findings.

Recognising the gap in research on part-time doctoral students, Neumann and Rodwell (2009) looked at the completion of part-time research students in an Australian institution 2000 – 2005. They found that the process of involvement for part-time students was lacking in focus, leaving them feeling like 'invisible' members of the research cohort. This research echoes McCulloch and Stokes (2008:9) who suggest part-time students are frequently viewed as 'transient or itinerant researchers, not fully connected to the institution' and it is this feeling of distance that led a number of women to feel 'second best' or 'not a priority for the institution'.

In the context of the 'disconnected' part-time student, Pilbeam and Denyer (2009) consider the role of student networks and suggest that students benefit both intellectually with regard to sharing ideas and reflecting on their work with others, and emotionally as the links with fellow students provide a support that may not otherwise be experienced. Although the study focused on one institution, they suggest that encouraging these networks may help develop more of a community for research students, leading to a heightened engagement with the institution and a focus on completion. Brown & Watson (2010) in a study considering the impact of gender on the doctoral experience eight women who had completed or were near completion of their PhD were interviewed. Their findings suggest that being a mother had 'profound implications for doctoral-level study' highlighting that women's progress in academia is hindered by their 'dual lives' that are created through having children (Brown & Watson 2010:401). This is supported by Carter *et al.* (2013) who looked at data from counselling sessions held with 200 male and 200 female full-time doctoral students across two years. They identify tensions between domestic and academic demands which can have a dramatic impact on a woman's progression and ultimately, completion. This is echoed by Lindsay (2015) who identified the difficulty balancing family, work and study and lack of institutional support as factors influencing completion.

A number of barriers to completion faced by female doctoral students have been established by Philips & Pugh (1998), 'difficulties concerning legitimacy of topics and methodology', reflecting on the lack of women on decision-making committees, 'scarcity of academic role models' and 'problems of communication, debate and feedback' highlighting how some men do not know how to communicate with women as equals or professionals and consider an expression of an opposing point of view as disagreeable (1998 :116-118). Women are also highlighted as having to take on the 'second shift'. This theory is based on the structure of a woman's day, how she juggles employment and or study then arrives home to continue a different level of work in the form of housework and childcare (Hochschild & Machung 2012). This 'second shift' provides a barrier to study as the shift must be completed before women can focus on their own needs, in the case of the study, their need to do research and write. The time spent on the 'second shift' is therefore time taken away from the PhD which can cause tension within the private domain as the women experience frustration at the lack of time they have.

Another barrier to progress is what Clance (1985) describes as the 'Imposter Phenomenon'. This concept identifies that despite being intellectual and capable, many women suffer overwhelming feelings of inadequacy resulting in them working harder than is necessary to achieve success that they then rarely acknowledge as legitimate. They consider themselves an intellectual fraud. It is prevalent in bright, high achieving women who internalize feelings that they are not really clever and are simply fooling those around them. The women find 'innumerable means of negating any external evidence that contradicts their belief that they are, in reality, unintelligent' (Clance & Imes 1978:241). This inability to believe in one's achievements can affect a person's self-esteem and approach to study, with individuals having doubts about their own competence (Brems *et al.* 1994; Chapman 2016; Spears Studdard 2002; Thompson *et al.* 1998; Thompson *et al.* 2000). This lack of self-confidence, despite evidence of their success, leads to a constant dread of being exposed as inadequate (Bernard *et al.* 2002; Jostl *et al.* 2012; Kearns 2009; Kumar & Jagacinski 2006) and can lead to individuals having high levels of anxiety during tasks (Thompson *et al.* 1998).

Repeated success does nothing to lessen the imposter feeling or to bolster their self-efficacy (Clance 1985). Receiving praise or being promoted actually enhances imposter feelings as people feel uncomfortable and further doubt their ability (Sakulku & Alexander 2011). This is particularly the case when embarking on new projects or tasks (Clance 1985; Clance & Imes 1978). Although the Imposter Phenomenon can affect both men and women, it is considered to affect men much less frequently and with less intensity (Clance & Imes 1978). Bernard *et al.* (2002) argue that it may interfere more with a woman's approach to tasks as they 'experience conflict between femininity and masculine characteristics such as autonomy' (Bernard *et al.* 2002:331). There has been much written about the Imposter Phenomenon and the prevalent characteristics and traits of those with imposter feelings. Being more introverted than extroverted, a need to look smart to others and a non-supportive family background are some of the more commonly acknowledged criteria (Kumar and Jagacinski 2006; Langford and Clance 1993). The phenomenon will be explored further in the analysis of this thesis in relation to the women respondents' lack of self-belief. Their feelings around the process and how their lives are affected is a key aspect of this study and is a growing area of interest in Higher Education literature on the student experience.

The construction of Higher Education as an 'emotion-free' zone has changed due to a wider range of non-traditional students entering the market requiring more support, in combination with the growth of personal skills agendas and debates about 'emotional intelligence' (Leathwood & Hey 2009:429). Historically, the focus of research on the doctoral process in Higher Education has been on process, productivity and competency considering student success rates, numbers of students per faculty and grants awarded (Aitchison & Mowbray 2013). However, there is a growing literature that considers the more subjective, emotional aspect of the doctoral experience (Castandeda & Isgro 2013; Evans & Grant 2009; Wolfinger & Goulden 2013). These studies consider the student's perceptions, thoughts and feelings and provide a new dimension to literature on the PhD process. The range of topics is diverse, such as the transition from housewife to academic (Chan 2003) coping with pregnancy, newborns and a PhD (Grenier & Burke 2008) experiences of life stress affecting the PhD (Seagram *et al.* 1998) and the emotional

experience of International students (Cotterall 2013). This study will add to the current literature, providing an interesting insight into a relatively unexplored cohort of students.

Despite the research highlighted in this section that allude to women as subjects of investigation regarding postgraduate study, when looking at the female demographic, the majority of studies in Higher Education focus on the undergraduate experience, the women's roles as 'returners' to H.E from access courses up to degree level. The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort, an area that has been largely overlooked despite recent predictions suggesting that in less than a decade the majority of doctoral graduates and, ultimately, new academics' will be women (Artess *et al.* 2008).

4.2.4. Summary table of factors influencing student's completion rates

Author	Sample	Factors influencing completion rates
Hockey (1994)	First year PhD students	Identity fragmentation Solitude Lack of support for transition from undergraduate to postgraduate
Lenz (1997)	11 Non-traditional female postgraduate students over the age of 35	Family, peer and supervisory support were crucial to timely completion
Kember (1999)	Part-time students in three countries	Negotiation of social roles Support from friends, family, colleagues Sacrifices made in other aspects of life
Wright (2003)	Full and part-time postgraduate research students	Training and initiatives Institutions role seen as key – support & guidance Sense of community to reduce isolation
Sarikakis (2003)	Doctoral students from 11 different countries. 30 female, 22 male.	Family responsibilities negatively impact completion Overt or subtle sexism is harmful to individuals and educational culture
Leonard, Becker & Coate (2004)	Doctoral students who had completed 2,5 & 10 years ago	Gendered domestic division of labour hindered women's progress

Gardner (2008)	Doctoral students from 2 American institutions	Male dominated environment Lack of integration with peers & isolation Balancing time & priorities was key to those part-time and/or with children
Neumann & Rodwell (2009)	Part-time research students in Australian institution	Lack of involvement in the institution Poor infrastructure and research culture impeded completion
Pilbeam & Denyer (2009)	Research students	Students networks were highlighted as an important factor in student progression
Brown & Watson (2010)	8 female doctoral students	Tensions between the 'dual lives' - domestic and academic demands hindered progress.
Carter, Blumenstein & Cook (2013)	200 male and 200 female full-time doctoral student counselling sessions	Demand of dual responsibilities Access to conferences and supervisory relationship
Lindsay (2015)	8 doctoral students	Difficulty balancing work & family with study, lack of institutional support and supervisor role not focused on 'project management' all hindered completion

4.2.5 The Supervisory role

The role of supervisor has been identified as a vital component to PhD completion (Green & Powell 2005; Phillips & Pugh 1998; Phyalto, Vekkaila & Keskinen 2015) and is therefore an important factor to explore within the context of completion. The practice of supervision has been referred to as a 'craft' The key elements of this craft are balancing intellectual involvement and the timing of this, foreseeing possibilities throughout the supervision, critiquing, informing and guiding the student (Hockey 1997). The role of supervisor is complex (McCulloch *et al* 2016) as they are required to manage not only the functional areas of doctorate supervision incorporating the administrative requirements of the institution but also the pastoral aspects that consider student development and involvement in the research community (Benmore 2016; Delamont *et al*. 2008; Lee 2008). This is particularly difficult when managing the involvement of part-time PhD students who are more disparate than full-time students in their engagement with research communities of practice within the University. Rugg & Petre (2007) suggest the relationship between research student and supervisor is akin to a marriage, however Delamont *et al.* (2008) disagree, stating that marriages come with emotional baggage and an academic partnership should be a business relationship. This is echoed by Pearson & Brew (2002:143) who recognise how supervisors are like managers and leaders, 'motivating, educating and leading others' and their skill base should reflect this accordingly. Supervision is a crucial part of successful completion (Hemer 2012) yet there are many obstacles facing both student and supervisor when navigating the relationship. Hockey (1996:361) identifies a number of problems facing supervisors when dealing with doctoral students. These include the lack of student motivation, diminishing enthusiasm for the research, lack of intellectual self-confidence and domestic factors inhibiting progression. The findings within this study demonstrate that many of the factors highlighted by Hockey (1996) are enhanced when studying part-time. As a supervisor, managing these problems requires a range of skills including patience, enthusiasm, academic experience and empathy. This range of skills that develops further than the functional is highlighted as 'compassionate rigour' (Manathunga 2005b). It could therefore be argued that supervisors of part-time PhD students require a greater degree of

compassion, experience and enthusiasm to manage the difficulties that may arise from individuals studying part-time.

Supervision development is now on the agenda at many higher education institutions but the level and range of 'training' is inconsistent and does not always address the obstacles highlighted in the literature regarding students' more personal difficulties, which include depression, debt and poverty, isolation, and poor employment prospects (Delamont *et al.* 2008). There are also other challenges such as the range of doctorates currently on offer in the UK which require a diverse approach to supervision, including professional doctorates, taught doctorates, practice-based doctorate, PhD by publication as well as the 'traditional' PhD route (Green & Powell 2005). Despite the inconsistencies there is growing institutional control over the supervisory process (Hinchcliffe *et al.* 2008) aided by the Quality Assurance Agency Framework for Higher Education Qualification which has a defined framework for research students (QAA 2012). Historically supervision was based on the 'secret garden' approach (Park 2005; Park 2007) whereby the PhD student and their supervisor worked without scrutiny from a graduate school or the wider institution. This is no longer the case as it has been recognised that the process requires a more universally consistent framework.

Addressing the ethics of supervisory responsibility, Halse and Bansel (2012) propose a 'learning alliance'. This identifies the complexities of the student-supervisor relationship within the Higher Education context and suggests that a learning alliance provides 'an implicit agreement of each student, supervisor and university that they are jointly responsible for ensuring a fruitful doctoral experience and a high quality doctoral degree' (Halse & Bansel 2012:384). This learning alliance requires a good level of communication and understanding between all parties, which can be difficult to achieve when considering the non-traditional PhD student. Their engagement with the institution and their supervisor tends to not reflect the patterns of engagement of traditional full time students and requires a more bespoke approach as this cohort of non-traditional students have a wide variety of factors that affect the level of involvement they have with their supervisor and the institution.

An institution enrolling the 'non-traditional' PhD student must also consider the variables such a student brings to their studies. In relation to mothers studying part-time, the issues of childcare responsibilities and employment can lead to sporadic engagement with the institution and therefore the supervisor. This can lead to pedagogical challenges and difficulties in building up a working relationship if face-to-face contact is minimal (Watts 2008). There can be tensions in the student-supervisor relationship as supervisors are already managing conflicts between institutional targets and a personal agenda of research quality (Lee 2008). They then have to manage an often sporadic relationship with the part-time students which can cause 'constructive friction' between the actors involved (Vermunt & Verloop 1999). This friction can be destructive if the student feels de-motivated by a lack of involvement, feeling they have little support with the lack of a student-centred approach they are more likely to leave the institution or interrupt studies. Research by Heath (2002) identified that meeting fortnightly with supervisors led to students feeling satisfied with their supervisory experience and resulted in timely completion. There should therefore be what Watts (2008:372) describes as an 'elastic' approach to supervision, recognising the need to be flexible and responsive to the part-time student's needs, resulting in 'shared control' (Pyhalto *et al*. 2012).

Easterby-Smith *et a*l. (2002:15) suggest that supervisors should have the following characteristics.

1. Technical expertise – although they highlight that general knowledge may be more useful than in-depth subject specific
2. An active researcher – ideally belonging to International networks thus aiding academic career advancement through their links to journals and key subject personnel
3. Set realistic deadlines – without interfering too much with the detail of the work
4. A responsive approach – encourages autonomy and independence in students whilst being willing to respond to problems quickly

5. Be available - review and feedback work in a short time frame of approximately two weeks

Aside from the more practical aspects of supervision, there are also issues around the skills of a researcher in their teaching of research. As such, it is argued that research degree study should be within the remit of teaching and learning, focusing on the student learning requirements, not just their research output (Green & Powell 2005). Halse (2011:568) suggests formalising learning and knowledge required for doctoral supervision which she argues, goes against the 'codified knowledge traditionally cherished by the academy'. Despite the tradition for supervisors to have complete autonomy when supervising students, the process of supervision is moving towards being an institutional responsibility, with increased emphasis on supporting the supervisor, providing them with relevant training and guidance through institutional frameworks (Phillips & Pugh 1998) it therefore seems appropriate to acknowledge the guidelines issued by the Quality Assurance Agency.

- Higher education providers appoint supervisors with the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively.
- Each research student has a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact.
- Higher education providers ensure that the responsibilities of research student supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students
- Higher education providers ensure that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively (QAA 2012).

The role of the supervisor has been assessed by some within the framework of services marketing. Considering postgraduate supervision as 'a service delivery based on co-creation of the research project', Dann (2008:343) argues that the role of the supervisor should reflect the commercial aspect of service delivery. This is echoed by a number of

studies that utilise the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985) model of service delivery when measuring the postgraduate experience (Angell *et al.* 2008; Centeno *et al.* 2008; Hill 1995; Oldfield & Baron 2000). Postgraduate supervision is an area of focus for Higher Education institutions which should be considered a positive step to ensure they are supported in their role and have the necessary resources, knowledge and ability to fully support doctoral students.

Communities of Practice Theory, specifically the four components to learning, have been identified as a useful framework to explore the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD. The key areas within these experiences are that of the student experience, their feelings during the whole process of studying, motivation and identity. Self-Determination Theory enables the women's motivation to be evidenced through the three areas of autonomy, competence and relatedness, highlighting the intrinsic desire to pursue an activity outside the realms of their existing lives. In doing so, they exposed themselves to shifts in identity as they attempted to maintain their current in-group memberships. The use of Self-Categorization Theory provides an understanding of these shifts as the theory defines these changes based on in-group characteristics and the reflection of these for acceptance into each group. The discussion of these theories provides a foundation for the women's narratives and experiences to be understood, enabling key themes to emerge that further demonstrate how study for a part-time PhD has had an impact on the women's lives.

5. Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This research aims to develop a clear understanding of the motivations and experiences of mothers undertaking part-time doctoral study, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort. The main research questions considered what the experiences of this particular cohort were and what impact studying had on their lives. This study will consider respondents from the North West of England. Data from the HESA 2006/07 indicates that there are over 25,000 taught female postgraduate students aged 21-50 in the North West alone. The key issues highlighted through the lived experiences of the respondents should provide substantial data from which conclusions can be drawn.

> 'The self forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future. The individual appropriates his past by sifting through it in the light of what is anticipated in an organised future' (Giddens 1991:75).

This chapter addresses the methodology of the study and considers the research method and autoethnography including a personal narrative, rationale for a pilot study, access to field and transcription and confidentiality issues along with an explanation of the analysis of data. The methodology will take an interpretivist approach, incorporating a personal description of a lived experience with the lived experiences of a selection of women with children embarking on part time doctoral study in the North West, as it is possible one's own experiences are the experiences of others (Manen 1990). Although the narratives may stem from individual differences, they can reveal common understandings and represent shared experiences of postgraduate study. As suggested by Taylor (2000),

> 'personal singularity is less important than the sense of a life being able to give depth to a group's shared experience. Frequently, such groups are marginalized or underrepresented in official accounts' (Taylor 2000: 75).

Considering the lived experiences of mothers engaged in part-time doctoral study will provide a rich insight into the dynamics of their lives and the consequences of the choices made. The lived experience is a 'reflexive re-living of something meaningful' (Manen 1990:36) it allows the researcher to adopt a reflexive view in an attempt to understand the deeper significance of an aspect of human experience (Smith *et al.* 2010). When there are a number of individuals experiencing the phenomena identified, a 'composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals' can be considered (Creswell 2007:58). There are however, no assumptions made about the commonality of experience of the women respondents in this study, their accounts of studying whilst bring up children are all very diverse, 'not only do our gender experiences vary across the cultural categories, they also are often in conflict in any one individual's experience' (Harding 1987: 7). This supports the work of Giddens (1991) and Josselson (1996) who argue our experiences within our many roles can be very different and often contradictory. Harding suggests that consequently, feminist research projects originate primarily not in 'women's experiences' but in women's experiences in political struggles, whether the site of such struggles be the kitchen or the boardroom it is through them that one can come to understand oneself and the social world (Harding 1987:6). This is echoed by Hughes (2002b) who argues that although there may be disagreement between feminist theories as to how research is conceptualized, there is a common understanding that 'feminist analysis of experiences is responding to women's position in society as being devalued, silenced or oppressed' (Hughes 2002b:155). The backgrounds and life dynamics of the women respondents are all very different. However, the roles they adopt, their feelings around studying whilst bringing up children and their perceptions of the process have highlighted a common ground and provided a rich insight into the similarities of experience and feelings despite their diversity.

5.2 Methodological approach

This study will adopt an interpretivist approach, privileging subjectivity rather than objectivity (Stokes 2011) and acknowledging that there may be many potentially meaningful interpretations of the data sourced for this study (Bryman & Bell 2011; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). The focus of interpretivism is on the 'uniqueness of human inquiry', this understanding is known as 'Verstehen' which considers the process by which meaning is created through interpretation of human action (Schwandt 1994: 120). When considering lived experience using an interpretivist approach, there can be no orthodox or standard interpretation. Meanings are established from people and their experiences and how they relate to the world around them (Miles & Huberman 1994). Each respondent will relay experiences based on their own values, thought process and interpretation of events. An interpretivist approach is therefore one that allows an open interpretation of experience, considering the respondents accounts of issues as a socially constructed reality (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Interpretivists do not generalise and consider society to be too complex to be measured through a positivist approach, instead the researchers will immerse themselves in the culture and social setting which often results in a more subjective view of the subject (Bryman & Bell 2003; Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, Fisher 2007; Wilson 2010). Interpretevism is a way of making sense of the world by considering how individuals or groups 'interpret and understand social events and settings' (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008:19). It is therefore an approach that reflects distinctiveness and difference, it is an attempt to understand rather than explain human behaviour (Bryman & Bell 2011).

Specifically, this research will reflect a feminist standpoint epistemology, which considers 'women's *concrete experiences* as they provide the starting point from which to build knowledge. It is important to begin with women's lives, as they themselves *experience them,* in order to achieve an accurate and authentic understanding of what life is like for women today' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2007:56). Within the framework of feminist standpoint, the diversity of women's lives is recognized and it is important to acknowledge the different standpoints the women may inhabit. Yet despite the range of experiences and

distinct characteristics of each woman's standpoint it is still possible to gain an understanding of their experiences and knowledge can be built for a greater comprehension of the phenomena (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2007). Quantitative and positivist methods can be detached from the subject matter (Carson *et al.* 2005) and feminist researchers consider them to objectify the participants rather than allowing them to explore the multi-faceted lives of women. Qualitative research is therefore more suited to feminist research as it allows an understanding of women's lives from their own perspective, Smart (1984:155) suggests that qualitative interviewing is 'intrinsically feminine' as women are natural facilitators of conversation. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of mothers undertaking part-time doctoral study. In order to find common experiences, themes and an overall essence of the experience of all participants, a phenomenological theme was selected (Cresswell 2007).

Phenomenology is grounded in the philosophical works of Husserl (1970) who considered the experiences of humans within the 'life world'. This is an approach built on by Heidegger (1962/1927) who used Hermeneutic Phenomenology to consider human experience as it is lived. His approach was developed from Husserl's Phenomenological approach to research. Although both focus on lived experience and the understanding of experience through interpretation, the involvement of the researcher differs with each. The researcher biases and perceptions are set aside in a Phenomenological approach, ensuring there is a lack of researcher reflexivity (Laverty 2003). However Hermeneutic Phenomenology considers that the analyst or listener always brings their own assumptions and prior experiences to the encounter and it is acknowledged that this 'fore-structure' may be an obstacle to interpretation (Laverty 2003).

Although phenomenology is concerned with the way people experience their lives and make sense of them rather than the cause of things, it is often used as a synonym for all research styles that, in contrast to positivism, consider subjectivity and interpretation as key elements rather than an objective, statistical method of research (Cresswell 2007; Denscombe 2010; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2010). The researcher therefore acknowledges the term phenomenology as an umbrella term for the overall basis to the study but does

not consider it specific enough to underpin the whole approach. To maintain an interpretivst style of research, the thesis was focused toward the lived experience of the women and the interpretation of the "texts" of their lives (Manen, 1990). This is echoed by Cresswell (2007) who identifies that participants' perspectives and the meanings they make of their experiences can be varied and open to interpretation, thus providing a more complex view of a subject. The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, therefore in keeping with hermeneutic phenomenological thinking, the researcher felt an appropriate approach would be for the women to produce narratives of their lived experience.

Lived experience is an interpretative approach, connecting the 'internal with the social' (Ellis & Flaherty 1992:6), it is a way of creating meaning in and about our lives (Clandinin 2006). One of the key elements of lived experience is the subjective way we view ourselves, define ourselves and interpret the meaning of our experience (Ellis & Flaherty 1992). People's accounts of lived experience provide a deeper understanding of a specific human phenomenon therefore helping others to understand and identify the significance of certain aspects of our lives (Manen 1990). Narrating a lived experience produces an autonomous text (Lindseth & Norberg 2004) that attempts to make sense of an aspect of our lives, producing a universal essence of the phenomenon (Cresswell 2007) and an interpretation of life (Josselson & Lieblich 1993; Hatch & Wisniewski 1995). The way people experience the world and how this experience is interpreted can lead to new perspectives and ways of thinking. In the telling of lived experience 'both the teller and the listener take part in the narrated meaning' as they consider the key themes and interpret the narrative in the context of their own experiences (Lindseth & Norberg 2004:145). The interviews collected from the women were then used to develop a description of the lived experience of all of the individuals, as a way of understanding the world developed directly from the women's experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2007).

The aim of feminist research is to 'correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position' (Lather 1991:71).

Whilst there are many feminist perspectives (Marx, Standpoint, Postmodern, Liberal, Radical) it has been highlighted that 'feminism is a perspective, not a method' (Reinharz 1992:240) and as a result, it can be challenging to focus on just one due to its multi-faceted nature. The unifying goal of feminists and feminist research however, is to challenge and stop women's oppression, 'making the invisible visible, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than as objects for men' (Reinharz 1992: 248). This study will therefore reflect a feminist methodology that ensures women's voices are heard.

There are many critics arguing against a feminist methodology (Franz & Stewart 1994; Harding 1987; Stanley & Wise 1993), instead considering a feminist framework an appropriate way of navigating the complexities of feminist research. It is argued by Harding (1987:2) that there are only three categories of social inquiry and whilst these cannot be claimed as feminist methods, the way these methods are carried out can be very different. An approach whereby the researcher observes behaviours of women that traditional social scientists do not think are significant and listens carefully to how women think about their lives are two approaches that reflect feminist research. Indeed, this study is not suggesting it has adopted a feminist methodology, but has considered 'an intervention at the level of epistemology concerned with remaking what is seen as 'knowledge' in feminist terms' (Stanley & Wise 1993:188). This study will therefore reflect a feminist standpoint research model and while there are many different contexts to consider within the standpoint framework, some of the key points of the paradigms are:

- It builds on and from women's experience
- It sets women's everyday experiences at the centre of research concerns
- It employs feminist qualitative methods
- It assumes researcher reflexivity.

(Smith 1992:96).

In her research on women's lives, Stewart (1994:13-31) identifies a number of feminist strategies which echo the standpoint approach and have been adapted and used as a

framework in the research for this study. Firstly, to look for what has been left out. The feminist approach should be resisting the currently accepted definition of what the necessary subjects of inquiry should be and instead identifying what is relevant to women's experience. It is often assumed that to research the experiences of women, one should draw comparisons with the experiences of men. This suggests that women cannot be the subjects of inquiry alone and are not worthy of a study unless it includes the male perspective, however feminist literature argues that women do not define themselves according to men (De Beauvoir 1953; Gilligan 1982). This study is focussing on the lived experience of mothers and as highlighted earlier, the role of mother is seen as a female identity, enforced through social, cultural, technological and political contexts it refers to the women's experiences of looking after their child. As suggested by Harding (1987), studying women is not new but studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world is an approach that is to be embraced. 'The goal of feminist inquiry is to provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need' (Harding 1987:8). This reinforces the objective of this study, which was to understand the experiences of mothers involved in part-time PhD study with a view to informing the subjects and other women about these experiences. These shared experiences can help women gain an insight into the PhD process, the different approaches and coping mechanisms the women adopted, the impact on their lives and on their own identity and sense of self.

The second strategy is to analyse your own role or position as it affects your understanding and the research process. Utilising autoethnography as a way of acknowledging the researcher's own perspective and experience allows the researcher to identify her own position within the research. This approach is explored further in the researcher's own account of her experience as a part-time student mother. The third aspect to Stewart's framework is to identify women's agency in the midst of social constraint. Reflecting on the women's role of mother and the dominant discourse around a woman's role in society is therefore key to understanding a woman's agency and the way it is possible to challenge the current gendered framework to allow an alternative discourse to emerge. The final area is to explore the ways in which gender defines power relationships and in which

power relationships are gendered. The academic arena and the wider area of women in employment is a good example of the challenges of gendered power relationships whereby women's work-life integration is an area of contradictory frameworks reflecting gendered differences in responsibilities and life experiences (Gouthro *et al.* 2006).

5.3 Method: Feminist Paradigm for interviews

Kvale (1996) considered an interview to be two people seeking knowledge and understanding in a common, conversational endeavour. Although according to Czarniawska (2009) this is considered a dialogue rather than an interview, Kvale (1996) highlights how it deviates from what would be considered a dialogue due to the balance of power between interviewer and interviewee. In acknowledging this objectification of subject and on the understanding that a paradigm is a basic belief system representing a world view (Guba & Lincoln 1994), the researcher decided upon a feminist paradigm for interviewing to ensure a more balanced approach to the data collection. 'Interviewing is consistent with many women's interests in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people' (Reinharz 1992:20).

Ann Oakley (1981), in her work on motherhood, alludes to textbook 'recipes' for interviewing, a method of interviewing where the situation is a one-way process, the interviewer does not give information and the interviewees are objectified and have no personal meaning in terms of social interaction so are confined to their 'statistical comparability with other interviews and the data obtained by them'. These 'recipes' can differ greatly from the methods adopted by a feminist interviewer such as Oakley, who suggests that they can cause problems as the feminist interviewers 'primary orientation is towards the validation of women's subjective experiences as women and as people' (Roberts 1981:30). The intention of the researcher when conducting the interviews, was therefore to adopt a two-way process reflecting the thinking of Oakley and using a feminist approach to interviews.

The feminist paradigm for interviewing is one that avoids the objectification of the respondent, instead it encourages a 'non-hierarchical' approach when the interviewer 'is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship' (Roberts 1981:41). This is echoed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995:39) who suggest the quality of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee is key as the role of the interviewer should be to 'activate narrative production'. The nature of the questions is key to this, if they reflect the interests of the researcher they may not be open enough to allow the respondents the opportunity to give their narrative accounts. As a result, the questions should be specifically 'narrativised' (Holloway & Jefferson 2000).

Through a series of in-depth interviews, where the questioning is driven by information from the informant, the researcher aimed to grasp a deep understanding of the women's experiences. 'Empathizing with the women and developing a detailed understanding and appreciation of how they make sense of the world is key to a hermeneutic approach' (Elliott 2009: 43). There are numerous definitions of what narrative is, for the purpose of this study the researcher adopted the definition of Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008:121) who classify narrative as 'the textual actualization of a story at a specific time and context and to a specific audience'. Elliot highlights the importance of narratives.

> 'If the research focus is more on the meanings attached to the individual's experiences and on the way that those experiences are communicated to others then narratives provide an ideal medium for researching and understanding individuals' lives in social context' (Elliot 2009:26).

She then discusses the link between in-depth interviewing and narratives in her analysis of Susan Smith's study on mature women students. 'Smith demonstrates that the use of in-depth interviews and a focus on women's narratives gave a radically different and, to her mind, more accurate, view of the support they received' (Elliot 2009:23). Smith herself highlights the benefits of in-depth interviews when concluding her study.

> ‘The adoption of a feminist paradigm for interviewing has facilitated the discovery of some important insights into the private worlds of women returners. By enabling the women to tell their own stories and creating a context in which they felt comfortable exploring their feelings and experiences, I was able to learn more about those aspects of their lives which crucially affect their chances of success when they return to study’ (Smith 1996:71).

Elliott (2009) argues that internal validity is improved through the use of narrative as the participants provide specific details with their own vocabulary and conceptual framework to describe life experiences. ‘The focus of interest is on individual’s subjective interpretations and the meanings they make of their lives’ (Elliot 2005:23). This is supported by Weiss, ‘through interviewing we can learn about people’s interior experiences, the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work and their selves’ (Weiss 1994:1). Oakley highlights the importance of the role of the interviewer as ‘a tool for making possible the articulated and recorded commentary of women on the very personal business of being female in a patriarchal capitalist society’ (Oakley 1981:48). The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principle means by which feminists have sought to achieve the involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives’ (Graham 1984:112). Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to gain an interpretivist perspective on the women’s experiences. It allowed the women to talk about the phenomena they felt important to them, and from a researcher perspective it allowed for the identification of the phenomenon, for example an “object” of human experience (Manen, 1990). This was also in keeping with a feminist approach, ‘feminist researchers see in-depth interviews as a way of encouraging subjectivity and intensive dialogue between equals’ (Sarantakos 2005:64). There is no suggestion that men cannot demonstrate openness and empathy when interviewing women, however in this instance the women interviewed felt they could relate to the researcher both as a PhD student studying part-time and as a mother. The women acknowledged the researcher as someone having a similar experience to them and assumed an understanding of their situation based on an acknowledged common ground, therefore developing a sense of connectedness (Reinharz 1992).

Because the key is to establish a description of the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it, Cresswell (2007) suggests as many as 10 participants whilst Polkinghorne (1988) advocates interviewing between 5 to 25 participants. During recruitment of participants the researcher was given support from Vitae the North West postgraduate research hub and through a post on the newsletter, received 35 responses from women willing to be involved. The purpose of the interview is to develop a deep understanding of a human phenomenon via narrative material, and to explore the meaning of such experiences (Manen 1990). The material for this thesis is derived from in-depth interviews with 35 women. Because writing about experiences often forces a more reflective approach, which may make it harder to stay close to an experience as it is lived, the women's interviews were recorded and transcribed (Manen 1990). To validate an accurate reflection of the interview, the women were then shown the transcripts, to establish confirmation that the record represented a true account of their experience (Creswell. 2007). Allowing participants to view transcripts supports a feminist approach to research, it is non-hierarchal, non-exploitative and demonstrates transparency (Merrill 1999).

Although the aim of the interview was to allow the women to recount their experiences, an interview schedule was prepared to help facilitate the discussion and prepare the researcher for any difficulties that may arise during the interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Open questions without assumptions were used to avoid leading the women towards particular answers and the initial discussion started with the women being invited to talk about a descriptive experience, rather than an evaluation or critique, to make them feel more comfortable (Smith *et al*. 2010). 'Feminist researchers question the value and relevance of pre-coded questionnaire based research as it assumes that researchers already know the full range of responses they are likely to receive' (Henn *et al*. 2009:30). Therefore, open-ended questions were used to ensure non-standardized information was provided by the women (Reinharz 1992).

In each study the interviewer must consider the duration and desirability of repeat interviews as it is suggested that multiple interviews are likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and get corrective feedback on previously obtained information (Reinharz 1992:37). Whilst this approach endorses speaking to participants often more than once, the nature of the sample meant that this could prove difficult due to the circumstances and other commitments of the women in the study. They were all mothers who were juggling childcare with studying and, often work commitments or additional familial responsibilities. It is hard for some participants to find the time to be involved in the interview process (Squire 2008) and the initial request of additional time for multiple interviews was off-putting to some of the women who indicated lack of time as one of the biggest hurdles in the PhD process. They were already clearly going out of their way to be involved in the study and the researcher felt that multiple interviews would not be possible and would in fact deter some women from being involved in the study. The researcher, in acknowledging the nature of the lives of the intended participants, felt that one, in-depth interview would provide enough of an insight into the experiences of the women to validate the findings.

An alternative inductive method for gathering data would have been the use of focus groups which would provide data through the dynamics of people sharing experience and 'deriving understandings of their lived experience together' (Bryman & Bell 2011:514). However, as highlighted in this chapter, the nature of the women's lives meant that arranging a suitable time for both interviewee and researcher proved very difficult. If a number of other participants were required to meet at a convenient time for all, it may become impossible to schedule resulting in a diminished number of women involved. Another possible alternative would be the use of questionnaires, however this requires a more prescriptive approach with initial assumptions made about the women's experiences. They also limit the subject matter and range of questions to ask (Bryman & Bell 2011) and do not allow for rich, contextual data to be surfaced. Due to the nature of the study and the research questions, narrativized accounts provide the most in-depth insight into the women's experiences therefore interviews were selected as the most appropriate approach.

To ensure accuracy and validity of information obtained, the researcher e-mailed all of the women 9 – 12 months after their first interview with a copy of the transcribed interview. They were asked to confirm that the transcription was a true account of what they said and to also reflect on their feelings at the time (King & Horrocks 2010). Many of the women responded not only with confirmation of the accuracy of the transcript but also with an update on their current situation, how they felt, if their feelings had changed and other experiences they had to add since the last meeting. These updates enhanced the overall study, they built on the interviews which, whilst in isolation, could be considered a snapshot in time, with the addition of updated situations, provided an insight into the journeys of the women involved. It wasn't just that particular time that they were feeling low or time-poor or frustrated, their experiences and feelings stayed with them for longer, suggesting the interview was a reflection of the PhD journey as a whole, rather than a snapshot of one day. Despite the time constraints, all of the women were very motivated about making time to participate, indeed it has been documented that women welcome the opportunity to be listened to (Maynard & Purvis 1994). They spoke about how important they felt it was to be involved, that there was a need for their experiences to be known as there was a lack of information and help for them throughout the process. This helped validate the study in the eyes of the researcher, she wasn't the only one who felt there was a distinct lack of acknowledgement that women with children had different needs and managed variables in their lives beyond what the institution expected or cared about.

5.4 Autoethnography

Reflecting the feminist approach, Stewart (1994:18) highlights the importance of the researcher including their own roles or positions, considering how they impact their understandings of a woman's life: 'a feminist strategy begins with a recognition that the knower or researcher is *involved* in the process of knowing'. Harding (1987) echoes this, suggesting that the best feminist analysis insists that the inquirer be considered along with the subject matter, resulting in a real individual with specific desires and interests rather than an invisible, anonymous voice of authority (1987:9).

The researcher is in a similar position to the respondents in that she is a mother doing a part-time PhD and it is therefore acknowledged that there may be a subjective influence in data collection as the research could be affected by the researcher's assumptions or prejudices based on their own values and experiences, the 'hazards of intimate familiarity' (Hayano 1979:102). It is for this reason that the researcher felt it would beneficial to acknowledge her link with the subject, identifying her position in interpreting the women's narratives through one of the emergent fields within accounts of lived experience, that of autoethnography. By including an autoethnographic element, she was providing her perspective and experiences as an individual account within the study becoming 'both the researcher and the researched' (Muncey 2010:3). This is a method of exploring ones' own experiences and how they relate to the research through a personal narrative. Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner 2000:733) and enables the researcher to investigate the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual (Denzin 1997: xv). The subsequent personal narratives produced through autoethnographic accounts are stories that help make sense of our lives (Candinin & Connelly 2000; Dashper 2015; Dillow 2009; Holman Jones et al. 2013; Walker & Taylor 2014). This supports the thinking of Denscombe (2010:87) who suggests there should be a 'public account of the self', an introspection as the researcher reflects on how their beliefs, experiences and values may shape their interpretation of the research. Denzin

& Lincoln (2000) stress the importance of the writer not remaining on the outside of the subject matter, objectivity being rejected and replaced by the writer's life experience.

'Revealing the self in the text can highlight the tensions and contradictions of dichotomies such as self/other, writer/reader, author/audience. Individual and collective experiences are connected and linked in meaningful ways rather than denied or forgotten.' (Coffey 1999:133).

Literary critics have debated the meaning of the term autoethnography. Hayano considers the 'insider' perspective as key, 'possessing the qualities of often permanent self-identification with a group and full internal membership, as recognised both by themselves and the people of whom they are part' (1979:100). This echoes the thinking of Maanen (1985) who considers one approach to ethnographic writing to include the writer as 'the native'. Reed-Danahay reinforce this with their view of autoethnography as 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text' (1997:9). This supports the work of Hayano (1979) who considered prior cultural knowledge of a group and the ability to be accepted as a member of that group to be essential. The researcher does acknowledge however that, as is the case when re-telling a story, there may be issues of memory not being a complete record of the past and as a result there may be methodological issues around 'the truth of the account, how memory may have affected the narrative and the self-indulgence nature of including one's own perspective' (Muncey 2010:107). This question of authenticity is raised by Reed-Danahay (1997) when they question the authenticity of the voice in autoethnographic writing, who is speaking and on whose behalf? There is debate around whether the voice of the 'insider' is more credible or 'true' than the outsider but as Reed-Danahay argue, it is not as simple as one or the other, we all have a complex identity and the process of telling your story, whether through interviews or autoethnographic writing, involves a re-writing of the self. The lived experience of the self therefore is at the core of autoethnography, weaving story and theory together (Anderson 2006; Ellis 2004).

Autoethnography has been criticized for being self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey 1999), however an account that provides a transparent insight into the researcher's experience may provide an added dimension to the understanding of the motivations for the study and for a clearer perspective on the analysis of the interviews. It has been argued that a woman's motivations for autoethnographical writing are linked to a need for the reader to acknowledge their self-worth (Tedlock 2000). Yet in doing so, researchers who self-disclose are re-formulating the researcher's role in a way that maximises engagement of the self but also increases the researcher's vulnerability to criticism, both for what is revealed and for the very act of self-disclosure' (Reinharz 1992:34). There must therefore be an acknowledgement that in writing such an honest account, the writer is also exposing themselves to the 'vulnerability of revealing yourself' to the judgement of others (Ellis & Bochner 2000:738). There are also ethical questions around the use of autoethnography as the inclusion of others in a personal narrative brings into question ethical perspectives surrounding anonymity. The researcher has not included names in the personal narrative and whilst it may be obvious to some who the individuals are, all people mentioned have given their consent to be included in the research. 'There is risk others might pathologize us if we expose our vulnerabilities in writing and research' (Etherington 2004:142).

Acknowledging one's own experience of the subject is in keeping with the feminist approach to interviews: 'one's unique voicing, complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships and emotional expressiveness – is honoured. In this way the reader gains a sense of the writer as a full human being' (Gergen & Gergen 2002:14). However, it is important that the researchers story is not the focal point of the study, it should be used to enhance the understanding of the topic overall (Ellis 2004). Taking this approach can enrich the case study, adding depth and providing a multi-layered text (Humphreys 2005) whilst offering insights that more traditional academic writing may not achieve (Mykhalovskiy 1996). It is based on this perspective that the researcher adopted an analytic autoethnographic approach, building on the evocative autoethnographical approach described above to take a broader approach to the ethnographic reflexivity (Anderson 2006).

Analytic autoethnography has five key features that distinguish it from the evocative ethnography.

1. The researcher is a complete member

   This requires the researcher to 'approximate the emotional stance of the people they are studying' (Adler & Adler 1987:67). As a mother of two children studying for a doctorate part-time, the researcher reflects the other members of the group having similar experiences based on similar life situations. She is therefore identified as a complete member of the respondents involved in this study.

2. Analytic reflexivity

   An awareness of the reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their informants is required. To adhere to this, the researcher demonstrated complete transparency with the respondents, identifying her own life situation, family dynamics, work and study experience and acknowledged the potential for subjectivity within the research.

3. Narrative visibility of the researcher's self

   The researcher should be a visible social actor within the written text, their experiences are considered vital data to demonstrate their personal engagement in the subject. The researcher has therefore included a written account of her own feelings and experiences of studying part-time whilst working and bringing up children.

4. Dialogue with informants beyond the self

   Autoethnography is understood as a relational activity and should therefore reach beyond self-experience to incorporate dialogue with others. To reflect this, thirty-five women were interviewed about their experiences to provide a wider data set of understanding from which to draw meaning.

5. Commitment to theoretical analysis

   The approach taken is not just used to stimulate emotional response in the reader but to gain insight into a broader set of social phenomena. The autoethnographical account is therefore only one aspect of this study which also incorporates data from a wide range of participants and theoretical perspectives.
   (Anderson 2006: 378-388).

The researcher's personal narrative was the starting point for this research. The aim was to write a reflexive autoethnography that highlighted the subject and culture of the research in the hope that in doing so, it provided invaluable insights for participants and readers (Cresswell 2007; Ellis & Flaherty 1992).

> 'To a greater or lesser extent, researchers incorporate their personal experiences and standpoints in their research by starting with a story about themselves, exploring their personal connection to the project or by using personal knowledge to help them in the research process' (Ellis 2000:741).

5.5 Life History Grids

At the beginning of the study, the researcher considered using life history grids as a tool to prompt discussion with the participants around aspects of their lives. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) suggest that inviting the respondent to talk about specific times and situations will elicit a richer source of data and a life history grid is a way of highlighting core areas that can aid the respondent as they recount their lived experiences. Life history grids can take a number of different formats, the 'Balan' type is a sheet divided into columns with a row for each year of the participant's life (Elliott 2009:31). Pertinent information is then included in columns under headings such as parents, siblings, geography, friends, school, activities, health and romance. Significant happenings, where they lived, achievements, illnesses and relationships will all be recorded and used to understand the stories the respondents tell about their lives.

Pre-prepared life history grids help respondents recall dates/events across a broad area of time and can be used as a tool when relating their story. Whilst it does not inhibit the narrative, it may limit the area of discussion that exist beyond the framework set out by the grids. The life history grid provides contextual data, but the data is held within the realms of pre-determined categories. This does not help the respondent and researcher to develop an understanding of why things happened and how they may be affecting the present as each individual will have their own set of historical criteria that will almost certainly differ to the next persons as we all have many variables and place emphasis on different 'key moments' of our lives. 'The ''plot'' of a woman's life is seldom linear. The self is dialogic, parts of the self in conversation with each other. Identity encompasses all these selves, forming a narrative that weaves them together' (Josselson 1996:257). It was therefore decided to omit the use of life-history grids in this study as the experiences of the women should not be confined to the dictates of a pre-prepared sheet. They were encouraged to discuss their experience of part-time PhD study without a pre-determined focus, thus allowing them to talk about what was pertinent to them and their own personal experience.

5.6 Pilot Study

To allow the researcher the opportunity to evaluate interview topics and ensure appropriate areas were covered, a pilot study was undertaken (Carson *et al*. 2005). It was highlighted by a number of senior male academics, that the study should include men in addition to women. This was not the researchers view, however, to ensure a thorough approach that had a robust rationale, the researcher explored this possibility in the pilot study. The researcher spoke to five women and three men about their experiences of the part-time PhD process. All five women had children, two were in their first year of study at UCLan, one had just completed her PhD at Leeds Metropolitan and two of the women were work colleagues who were ready to submit their thesis at Liverpool Hope University. Two men were at Liverpool Hope University one was studying at Liverpool University, they were all in their second or third years and had children.

Semi-structured interviews were used to allow the opportunity for discussion and at times clarification of points made, it also provided the researcher with the opportunity to identify questions that were not understood or made participants uncomfortable (Bryman & Bell 2011). This approach is in keeping with a feminist approach to interviews, allowing the participants to use their own words to tell their story, rather than the researcher using their words as an interpretation of what was said. The researcher began by asking how they felt about doing a PhD at that particular point in the journey. The women who had completed spoke emotively, expressing feelings of relief and pride, yet without prompting also reflected on how difficult they had found the whole process. They brought up issues that were replicated in the interviews with the two women who had yet to complete. The women talked at length about the difficulties, the 'juggling' of tasks and the lack of time available to them to dedicate to the PhD. They felt they could never put the PhD as a priority and it was often only considered after all their other 'responsibilities' had been dealt with. They highlighted the conflict they felt with the differing roles they had, feeling that they had different 'hats' for different aspects of their lives. They expressed frustration at having to, what they described as 'keep up appearances' in work, feeling they had to keep their work persona separate from their 'mum' persona due to a lack of understanding

from their male colleagues who didn't have the role of primary carer in their own familial sphere. They worried about appearing unprofessional and felt the PhD would go some way to enhance their standing in the department. The three men talked in practical terms, it was a career enhancing exercise, they tried to fit some writing into the work day and did the rest of their work at home in the evening. They all took a functional approach to the work, treated it as something separate and work-oriented whereas the women weaved the work into their lives, adding it to the list of things they deemed themselves responsible for. The women talked about the guilt they felt at having to miss weekend family outings or quality time with their children when they were there but not really 'there'. The men did not discuss feelings of guilt, they focused on the PhD as a priority, a means to an end and did not feel compromised by the time it required.

These discussions varied in length but were approximately 90 minutes each. The researcher asked a few questions to initiate various angles of discussion but overall preferred to listen to the areas of the PhD journey that the individuals placed emphasis on. These initial findings informed the researcher's perspective on the normative experiences of part-time PhD study as the men in the pilot study did not experience the juggling, the guilt or the identity complexity that the women experienced. The men viewed the PhD in terms of functional advancement rather than an intrinsically driven project for self-enhancement and identity formation. This reinforced the researcher's view that a mother's experience of part-time PhD study was far more complex and did not reflect the normative process experienced by the men. The pilot therefore aided in the initial rational to keep the study focused on mothers.

The study also helped in the phrasing of some questions and in the fluidity of the interview structure, highlighting to the researcher the areas of experience that would be interesting for further investigation (Bryman & Bell 2011). The pilot study provided help in developing an approach to the interviews that focused on the areas that were prominent in the initial pilot discussions (Cresswell 2007).

5.7 Access to field

Although the researcher is a lecturer at a University in the North West, there was no clear access to potential participants due to the ethics of personal data held by the university. Each University had their own regulations regarding student communication and administrators were reluctant to allow an external researcher access to e-mail addresses and postgraduate student information. In an attempt to include women from across the North West the researcher contacted Vitae the North West postgraduate research hub. They expressed an interest in helping to recruit participants, acknowledging that the group of interest were under-represented in research areas. A post written by the researcher was placed on their newsletter, which was e-mailed to all postgraduate administrators and students based at institutions in the North West.

In keeping with the feminist approach to research, the post highlighted very clearly the position of the researcher, indicating her as a part-time PhD student and a mother of two small children who was interested in other mother's experiences of doctoral study. 'The researcher is expected to identify herself with the subjects and display this identification to the reader' (Sarantakos 2005: 62). The post invited people to contact the researcher via phone or e-mail if they wanted to take part or if they had any questions and needed clarification about the study. The researcher received over 60 e-mails from women within two weeks. Some were studying full-time but were willing to share their experiences if they were relevant to the study, some were considering embarking on a PhD and wanted advice and to know more about the findings of the study and two were based in Australia and one in Sweden and were not included in the research due to the International variables not taken into account in this particular study. 35 of the women did however fit the criteria of being a mum to children under 18 whilst studying for a part-time PhD and were identified as suitable for the research. Should more women have been available, there would have had to be a limit of 40 on the number of participants due to logistics of timing and organization of interviews. The researcher therefore felt 35 was a suitable number to provide a range of in-depth experiences.

The researcher then contacted the women who had agreed to take part and highlighted the research aims and what was required of them with regards to interview participation, including the expected length of time the interview would take and the use of a Dictaphone to record the interview. The process of arranging each interview was lengthy and time consuming as the nature of being a mother doing a part-time PhD is you have very little spare time and the time you do have available is limited and inflexible. A location and time convenient to the women were agreed on an individual basis (Sarantakos 2005) and e-mails were exchanged confirming details the night before the actual interview. Locations varied from quiet offices to crowded coffee shops but each interview was recorded via a Dictaphone. Recording and transcribing the interviews allowed for repeated, in-depth examination of the women's narratives and provided a document that could be used for verification that the transcript was an accurate representation of the interview (Bryman & Bell 2011).

At the beginning of each interview, the women were given the opportunity to read the consent form and ask any questions about the research. The researcher offered a copy of the consent form to each of the women (Carson et al. 2005; King & Horrocks 2010; Miles & Huberman 1994). They were asked to consider how they would like to be referred to in the research and were given the opportunity to change their name to provide anonymity, this was then documented on the consent form and signed by both individuals. They were given the option of keeping their name as some participants may have felt it was an important recognition of their involvement and indeed some of the women did refuse a pseudonym (Bryman & Bell 2011). Due to the e-mail conversations between the researcher and the participants whilst arranging the interviews, both parties had developed an on-line dialogue, giving small details about their lives that provided a more informal backdrop to the interview. Despite never meeting before, both women had established a common ground, reflecting the feminist paradigm for interviews that allows the researcher the freedom to answer participant questions and to expose aspects of their own lives in a process of self-disclosure (Reinharz 1992) and as a method of transparency and non-objectification of the participant (Hesse-Biber 2013; Oakley 1981).

5.8 Summary of mothers participating in the study

Name	Age	Occupation	Work FT/ PT	No. of children	Ages	Stage of PhD	Live in city of study
Jan	44	Senior Lecturer	FT	2	9 & 5	Submitting after 6 years	Y
Vanessa	48	Freelance Writer	PT	2	13 & 10	Registered for 2 years	Y
Patricia	54	Projects Manager	FT	2	23 & 18	Doing mods after 6 years	Y
Jo	39	Lecturer	FT	2	19 & 12	Registered 4 years	Y
Heather	39	Senior Lecturer	FT	2	11& 10	Registered 3 years	Y
Jess	44	Senior Lecturer	FT	2	10 & 6	Registered 6 months	Y
Stephanie	28	Stay-at-home mum		2	4 & 2	Registered 1 year	N
Naomi	46	Senior Lecturer	FT	2	17 & 12	Just passed VIVA	N
June	47	Senior Lecturer	FT	3	18, 14 & 7	Just passed VIVA	Y
Lynn	46	Senior Lecturer	PT	1	5	Re-submitted after 8 years	Y
Abby	37	Stay-at-home-mum		1	2	Registered 2 years	Y
Joan	31	Stay-at-home-mum		4	15, 6, 4 & 2	Registered 2 years	Y
Lynette	34	Management consultant	FT	1	3	Registered 1 year	Y
Kate	44	Senior Lecturer	FT	3	18, 13 & 9	Registered 2 years	N
Rachel	38	Senior Lecturer	FT	1	2	Registered 2 years	Y
Victoria	31	Music Teacher	PT	2	5 & 1	Registered 1 year	N
Grace	43	Admin Co-ordinator	PT	2	10 & 7	Registered 2 years	N
Therese	39	Senior Lecturer	FT	1	4	Registered 5 years	Y
Cath	36	Projects officer	FT	1		Registered 6 years	Y

Mary Ann	39	Nurse	FT	4	26, 24, 14 & 9	Registered 1 year	Y
Emma	43	Lecturer	PT	2	26 & 14	Writing up after 7 years	N
Laura	39	Research assistant	PT	2	9 & 7	Registered 2 years	N
Joanne	40	Senior Lecturer	FT	1	11	Registered 4 years	N
Sara	54	Lecturer	PT	2	14 & 11	Just passed VIVA	Y
Cecillia	36	Lecturer	FT	3	8, 7 & 5	Registered 3 years	Y
Trish	35	Head of Policy	FT	1	2	Registered 4 years	Y
Rachel	40	Lecturer	FT	2	13 & 9	Registered 2 years	N
Elizabeth	36	Stay-at-home-mum		2	4 & 6 mths	Registered 6 years	N
Sokieta	26	Stay-at-home-mum		1	7 mths	Registered 1 year	Y
Eileen	42	Civil servant	FT	1	5	Registered 7 years	Y
Helen	40	Lecturer	FT	2	5 & 3	Registered 6 years	Y
Paula	54	Manager in FE	FT	4	26, 25, 22 & 12	Registered 4 years	Y
Moyra	39	Lecturer	FT	1	4	Registered 2 years	N
Denise	48	Careers advisor	FT	2	25 & 18	Writing up after 6 years	N
Nikki	32	Researcher	PT	2	6 & 3	Completed	N

At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher asked for details about the women's occupation, as well as the ages of their children, the stage they were at with their PhD and whether they lived in their city of study. This information was recorded in a table as a snapshot summary of the women's situations at the time of interview. At the stage of writing the interview questions, the focus of the women's experiences was not known. The researcher wanted to document this information in case it was highlighted as key in the women's experiences. During the interview analysis, it became apparent that the

women's occupations were not seen by them as relevant, other than to express the difficulty of managing time between employment, study and home. If the women discussed difficulties with work colleagues, again it was the specific situation with individuals rather than the nature of the business or their role. Therefore the information in the table regarding occupation is not explored further within the analysis. This is also the case with the other variables in the table. It became clear once the interviews were completed, that whatever age your child was, there were always parenting challenges, it was not easier or harder for any specific age. There was also no real differentiation between the women at different stages, whether they were one year or four years into the programme, the difficulties and experiences did not change. The only difference was for the women who had completed. They had been allowed a period of reflection and were able to talk about the feeling of relief and elation that they had completed. However, they still discussed in detail the challenges and difficulties, completing the PhD did not distort the realities of the process in any way.

5.9 Transcription and confidentiality

Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was recorded onto a Dictaphone. The women were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences and were guided by a small number of questions. The women were asked about their first experiences of motherhood, their reasons for pursuing a PhD, how the PhD was managed in relation to their other responsibilities, their relationship with their supervisor, support throughout the process and the role of the university. The researcher, as a lecturer and mother of two young children, was concerned about the length of time it would take to transcribe 35 interviews. As has been demonstrated in the pilot study, studying part-time leads to a lack of uninterrupted time to work, which would have made transcribing very difficult and time consuming. There was a concern that it would delay the study and the researcher was keen to get an updated account of the women's situations 9 – 12 months after the first interview. The transcripts would be a written account of how the women felt at that point in time and would provide a point of reference and a document for comparison for the women moving forward. It was therefore important for the study that the transcripts were completed within a timeframe of six months. This would allow the researcher time to re-read them all whilst listening to the interviews prior to contacting the women again. The researcher secured research funding from two research committees at her place of work to pay for a transcription service to complete transcription of all 35 interviews.

In not completing the transcription herself, the researcher acknowledges she has not benefitted from the immersion into the data that transcribing work oneself allows.
To counteract this, the researcher listened back over the interviews whilst reading the transcription line by line. This was of great use to the researcher, the transcription was checked for accuracy and the interview data was reviewed a second time before the analysis began. As it is virtually impossible to completely capture the meaning from an interview when transcribing, the more detailed a transcription is, the more clues are provided for interpretation and analysis (Eliott 2009:51).

Each participant was then sent a copy of their transcribed interview to allow them to check that the transcription was a true account of what was said (Andrews *et al.* 2009). As the interview is a 'forced introspective' it may not always be a positive experience to recount what was said and the researcher was mindful of this when providing transcripts, allowing the women as much time as they required to read through the full account of their interview (Miller 2000: 104). However, in showing the women their transcripts, it allows them to comment on the accuracy as transcriptions can be interpretative practices and it was important that the women felt the transcription was an accurate reflection of the interview (Reissman 2008). It also demonstrates transparency and openness between the researcher and the interviewee. The women then sent an e-mail to the researcher stating they were satisfied with the transcription and they were still willing to allow their experiences to be included in the study. During this exchange the researcher also clarified the name they would be referred to in the research and provided them with the opportunity to change their name once they had reviewed the transcription.

Many of the women, on reading the transcript, decided to anonymize themselves and the institutions they were involved with. They felt they had been very honest in their interviews, talking very candidly about their experiences and feelings, which led to an aspect of vulnerability, both emotionally and in some cases professionally. To be able to use the interviews without harming the women, their professional standing and their relationships with others, it was decided in many cases to invite the women to provide pseudonyms for themselves, in keeping with them constructing the data of their lives (Graham 1984). In some cases, children's names, supervisors' identities and university locations were changed or omitted to ensure the women were not identifiable (King & Horrocks 2010). The researcher considered the various transcription options and whilst clean transcripts are perhaps easier to read, they lose some of the external verbal communication that can provide a deeper insight into the women's experiences. Therefore, the transcription was literal and included all verbal communication such as pauses, 'erms', laughs and regional slang without corrections (Miller 2000). The transcriptions of the narratives evidenced a range of themes common to most of the women participating in the study. To ensure these emerging themes were analysed using

a clear and structured approach, thematic narrative analysis was adopted to identify any patterns of themes from interview transcriptions. The following section details this approach.

5.10 Thematic Narrative analysis

'Narratives are based on life and life is expressed, articulated and modified in stories' (Josselson & Lieblich 1993:9). The stories or narratives of the mothers in this study were considered by identifying patterns or themes within what they said. This provided an understanding of the experiences of the women as a cohort, as the individual narratives were linked by common themes within their experiences of being part-time PhD students.

The analysis of the interviews for a narrative study usually requires the stories of each woman told separately (Kohler Reissman 2008). However, as the purpose of this thesis was to understand all of the women's experiences collectively, it was felt that an interpretivist study would be more appropriate so that the lived experiences of the women could be combined together to provide a universal essence of experience (Cresswell 2007). Structural narrative analysis can provide insights that may be missed if the interpretation of narrative concentrates on 'what' is said without heed to how the speaker organizes the content (Kohler Reissman 2008). Narrative analysis considers the story as a whole rather than thematic narrative analysis which is looking at component themes across a number of cases, considering what is said rather than the wider context of how, to whom or why (Kohler Reissman 2008). Although this study will explore individual women's experiences, it is expected that their narratives will not be confined to meaning for the individuals but will provide possibilities for group belonging and collective action. (Kohler Reissman 2008). Therefore, this study will adopt thematic narrative analysis to provide an 'experience-centered approach' (Squire 2008:42).

It is acknowledged that interpretivism is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process; therefore, it is acknowledged that the researcher made their own interpretation of the meaning of others' lived experiences (Cresswell, 2007). Thematic Narrative analysis considers the patterns of themes from the narratives, focussing on what is said rather than the context, audience or structures of speech (Eriksson& Kovalainen 2010; Kohler Reissman 2008). Themes should therefore focus on the essential, 'making the phenomenon what it is' (Manen 1990:107). This study is considering the experiences of mothers studying for a PhD and in acknowledging there was a possibility of similar experiences, the researcher felt that identifying themes across the individual narratives would provide a hermeneutic circle 'where the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part' (Smith *et al.* 2010:92). This increases a depth of understanding as one moves from parts of an experience to the context overall then back to the experience (Laverty 2003). This supports the work of Kohler Reissman (2008) who suggests that stories can have effects beyond their meanings for individual storytellers, 'creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging and collective action' (2008: 54) and reflects what Bruner (1986) refers to as paradigmatic reasoning, the analysis of narratives. This analysis of narratives results in descriptions of themes that remain across stories, 'making categories out of common elements' (Polkinghorne 1995:5) as opposed to narrative reasoning or narrative analysis, which takes descriptions of happenings and configures them into a story 'analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements and narrative analysis moves from elements to stories' (Hatch & Wisniewski 1996: 12). Thus, the women's stories are in line with paradigmatic reasoning, as the analysis provides themes that fit across all of their narratives, linking their experiences with common threads. 'For those of us who have the privilege, courage and tenacity to stay the course, may our narratives be revealed to inspire and enhance education for women' (Chan 2003:479).

Themes can be defined as concepts, trends, ideas or a distinction that emerges from empirical data (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2010:219). Manen (1990) suggests a theme gives 'control and order to research and writing' and may be understood as the '*structures of experience'* (1990:79). He details what he considers a theme to be:

1. Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning – one must consider the true meaning of what has been said
2. Theme formulation is at best a simplification – often when arriving at themes there is a tendency to summarise the notion with the potential to lose some of the meaning
3. Themes are not objects one encounters at certain points in the text
4. Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand – a theme is therefore an aspect of the structure of the lived experience
   (Manen 1990: 87).

In considering the various approaches to thematic narrative analysis, Manen (1990) identifies three that he feels are most appropriate for the consideration of lived experience. The first tries to capture the fundamental meaning of the text as a whole, the second is a detailed reading considering each sentence, the third is selective reading that requires the text be read several times whilst considering the statements of phrases that reveal something about the experience being described. The difficulty with the third is that it opens the researcher up to subjectivity as they are then determining what they consider to be meaningful in the narrative. As the researcher has already highlighted her position within an autoethnographic account of her own experiences, the level of subjectivity has already been acknowledged. This final approach is one that the researcher felt most appropriate for the women's narratives as they talked about different aspects of their experience which could then be segmented and considered as part of their overall experience. This is in keeping with a 'case-centred' approach that considers different segments within the narrative that relate to different aspects of the women's overall experience (Kohler Reissman 2008).

Due to the time that manual processing of transcriptions can take, the researcher considered utilising the computer aided data analysis (CADA) package NVivo to aid in the identification of key themes and subsequent narratives that reflected such themes. The advantages were clear, CADA is accurate, reliable, efficient, convenient and saves time (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Sarantakos 2005). However, having trialled the NVivo software, the researcher found that it distanced her from the women's words and lacked a 'closeness to the data' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Having to immerse herself in the transcriptions, reading them over and over, the researcher felt she could identify themes through the women's descriptions of situations and feelings that a computer program may have missed due to the differences in language and examples provided by the women. These subtleties in language and emotion expressed by the women could be detected in the recordings and in the transcriptions yet a computer may not pick up on such human 'data'. The researcher could not have fully understood the subtle nuances of the women's experiences if she had relied solely on a computer program. Her experience is supported by Sarantakos (2005:359) who argues that CADA programmes provide an artificial approach as 'the evidence of the data is not accessible to machines'. Sarantakos also highlights how a structured approach adopted by CADA is 'exactly what qualitative methods should offer a path away from' and they demonstrate their use for many theoretical approaches without distinction in their methodologies.

5.11 Template Analysis

There are a number of approaches that can be taken with thematic narrative analysis. The use of codes, 'a priori' themes and the focus of the analysis can vary quite significantly between methods. Due to the researcher's own experience of the subject matter informing the study and in her acknowledgement through the autoethnographic account that there is a subjective view of the data, she felt an analysis that recognized 'a priori' themes in advance would provide the most transparent approach to the women's narratives. Therefore, template analysis was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this study.

The approach of thematic narrative analysis relies on establishing themes in each of the women's narratives. As highlighted above, to ensure clarity within this process, the researcher used template analysis (King 2012) a technique of coding that acknowledges there can be a number of interpretations of the data depending on the reflexivity of the researcher. This approach to analysis is said to provide a flexible technique of identifying themes that emerge from the study of narratives. This flexibility regarding procedures for data gathering and analysis allows the researcher to adapt the method of analysis for their own study and it considers themes across all narratives rather than analyzing individual cases (King 2012). It is argued that template analysis is not a methodology but a technique, as its flexibility lends itself to a number of research approaches (King 2012). It does not prescribe a set number of codes or themes or hierarchy as grounded theory does, instead it gives the researcher the freedom to 'identify themes wherever they find the richest data' (King 2012: 429). This puts template analysis 'between content analysis where codes are all predetermined and their distribution is analysed statistically, and grounded theory where there is no a priori definition of codes' (King 1998:118).

With template analysis there are no fixed levels of coding hierarchy, instead the process requires the researcher to establish a coding framework initially with a priori codes or themes that can be used as a starting point in analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that themes should initially be derived from literature, other approaches include considering professional definitions and researcher's experiences (Denzin and Lincoln

2000). Due to the autoethnographic aspect of this study, and in accordance with both Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Miles and Huberman (1994) the researcher began the analysis by identifying some general themes that became apparent from her own experiences and when reading the literature on mothers, female students and the postgraduate experience. These 'a priori' themes were the starting point for the rest of the analysis. The 'a priori' themes of motivation, identity and student experience were not emergent, they were established from the reflexivity of the researcher, reflecting on her own experiences of being a part-time PhD student and a mum. This template was then modified as the researcher began reading through the transcriptions, considering broad themes and sub-themes from a subset of data. After using the template on this small subset the researcher considered any patterns in terms of themes and modified the template, identifying any cluster themes. Some of these cluster themes emerged from the 'a priori' themes and were maintained throughout the study. The template therefore had a range of main themes and cluster themes that enabled the researcher to identify the women's narratives in relation to the following areas. The women's roles in various groups, their perceptions of themselves within these groups and their interactions with the other members of the groups were all areas connected to the 'a priori' theme of identity. The topic of motivation was linked to cluster themes of an internal desire to achieve something for themselves, the need for a challenge, the need to develop themselves, the desire for something new in their lives and the desire to prove themselves capable of something more than motherhood. The student experience was an 'a priori' theme as the researcher herself felt she lacked the experience of attending research seminars, having a presence on campus, meeting other students and engaging with the institution and its various postgraduate courses and workshops. Cluster themes emerged throughout the women's narratives, all relating to the need for a student experience yet highlighting the current lack of one. The role of the supervisor, the institution infrastructure, bureaucracy and administration, student culture, research culture and online communities were all identified as recurring issues within the women's narratives.

There were also new themes emerging about the women's own feelings and emotions during the PhD process. Guilt, anxiety, lack of self-belief and confidence all became

apparent as key issues in the women's experiences. The emotional aspect of the PhD process was not something the researcher had identified on the initial template but it was a theme occurring in all of the 35 interviews conducted. As a result, the template was adapted to reflect the issues the women discussed as pertinent and important to them as mothers working for a part-time PhD. The remaining interviews were then studied using the template. This process allowed a continual process of reflection on the themes, maintaining the potential to revise and add to the template to show a true account of patterns emerging from the data. The coding process of attaching a label to a section of text to indicate its relevance to the theme then allowed the researcher to establish a clearer picture of the relevance of the current themes. The template therefore had broad themes of motivation, identity, the student experience and feelings and emotions of the women. The cluster themes detailed above were then linked to these themes to provide a template that encompassed a range of areas for further analysis.

The aim of establishing themes was that they represented the experiences of the majority of the women respondents. It was important therefore that the majority of the women discussed the issues captured by the themes to ensure those areas highlighted as important by the women were representing the cohort of mothers rather than one or two of them. The literature has indicated variants of descriptions of participant mothers, 'many', 'the majority' and 'a number of' have all been used to categorize the commonality of a theme (Braun & Clarke 2006). For the purpose of this study and to ensure a theme is recurrent and manifests itself in many of the women's narratives, the researcher focused on issues and experiences that at least half of the women discussed. Each individual had their own approach to mothering whilst balancing part-time PhD study and these individual narratives provided an insight into their own personal lives. However, the experiences recounted by the women that were echoed by others in the study were the experiences, feelings and issues that were used by the researcher to determine a collective view on the experience of being a mother and a part-time PhD student.

Adhering to the guidelines of Template Analysis, (King 2012) the researcher wrote definitions of the themes to ensure there was clarity when identifying text that appeared

relevant to particular themes. All text was considered and themes were modified from, for example, sub level to key themes as the analysis progressed. The hierarchy of sub and key themes does not reflect a level of importance, they reflect the theme as a broad concept with many aspects or a more specific theme reflecting a particular aspect of experience. Identifying themes is an interpretive process and some of the themes were integrated as they reflected what was important in the overall experience of the women.

There is an argument that template analysis is too structured and identifying themes for a template is too restrictive when handling people's personal narratives. Researchers may wish to engage with texts in a way that allows a more unstructured approach (King 2012). Kohler Riessman (1993:4) argues that 'because they are meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured'. She highlights that individuals construct meaning through their analysis and this must be kept intact. However, when working with many narratives, clarity of meaning can be gained from identification of common threads of meaning or themes that occur across the narratives studied. For the purpose of this study, when considering the experiences of 35 women in the hope of establishing a better understanding of them as a cohort of mothers undertaking part-time PhD study, identifying themes allows a unified experience to be explored whilst at the same time maintaining the integrity of the individual narratives and personal experiences of those involved.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

> 'When women speak for themselves they reveal hidden realities, new experiences and new perspectives emerge that challenge the 'truths' of official accounts and cast doubt on established theories. Interviews with women can explore private realms to tell us what women actually did instead of what experts thought they did or should have done.' (Anderson *et al.*1990:96).

Thirty-five women participated in this research, thirty-five voices, lives, experiences, feelings and beliefs have provided fascinating accounts of what it is to be a mother studying for a PhD. The only criteria in selecting these women, was that they were enrolled on a doctoral programme part-time and that they had children under the age of 18 in their care. It was not the intention to be prescriptive, the emphasis of the study was about motherhood and studying, so whether the women were married, had partners of either sex or not at all, were working or not, their class, income, other familial responsibilities, stage of PhD and all other variables were left to the women to disclose and discuss only if they felt it relevant to their own experience of the PhD process.

Focusing on the two key criteria led to a diverse range of women wishing to participate in the research. One might think that this would result in a huge range of experiences and themes that would be far reaching and unique to each individual, however, despite the different places the women were at in their lives, their different upbringing and life experiences, they all reflected similar themes when discussing their experiences as part-time student mothers. There were obviously variances of certain aspects such as whether they had a positive supervisory experience, but there were consistencies emerging from each account that enabled the researcher to identify commonalities among the women's experiences. To support researcher reflexivity and to identify the researcher's own commonalities with the women's experiences, an autoethnographic account of the researcher's own lived experience has been included below.

6.2 On reflection – a personal narrative

Ethnographic texts can appear in many forms, short stories, poems, novels, fiction or essays (Ellis 2000). As my experience should not dominate but add to the research (Anderson 2006) I felt the most appropriate channel for my own experience would be an essay. The following seven pages detail an autoethnographic account of my own lived experience of managing motherhood with part-time PhD study.

I have always been very ambitious and career focused and worked hard to be a success, priding myself on my work ethic. I worked in the media for 10 years which was an all-consuming career involving an 'it's not just a job it's your life' attitude that I eventually grew weary of and moved into academia 13 years ago. Although I didn't want a 24/7 job, I was still very driven and embarked on my new career with plans to swiftly climb the promotional ladder…….then I became pregnant with my first child.

The first time the reality of leaving work hit me was the moment I handed my lectures over to the person covering my maternity leave and a sense of panic washed over me. I wanted to snatch them back and say 'actually it's ok, I'll fit them in around feeds'. Relinquishing control of the lectures was a critical turning point and the first stage in my relinquishing control of my role and therefore in some respect, my 'self' as it was then (Millward 2006). I realised at that point how much of my identity was tied up in what I did for a living. I was afraid to let go, worried that I would be replaced too easily. I naively, in a desperate attempt to maintain an element of control over my role, talked of doing some second marking, popping in regularly to keep up with what was going on, attending departmental meetings and generally acting as if maternity leave didn't exist. This was all swiftly forgotten the moment Megan arrived.

Nothing prepares you for the rollercoaster of emotions you experience when you have a baby. You would do anything for the little person you are holding and your priorities shift hugely as they take centre stage. The process is transformative (Smith 1999) and it is quite overwhelming, nothing really prepares you for how much your needs become forgotten

and the baby's needs are all-consuming. The reality of having a newborn baby to look after forced me to address the ridiculous notions I had of everything returning to the way it was. The job became a distant memory lost in a void filled with nappies, pureed vegetables and a constant need (verging on obsession) to count how many hours sleep I had every night. On some level, it was a relief to let go of the work pressure, knowing I had legitimate time off led me to slowly adapt to a slower-paced life. If something needed doing, I began to accept that it would probably take me longer and I would plan my days accordingly.

After the initial fuss of the 'new baby' and 'first grandchild' died down, life returned to some semblance of normality, except I now had a new career, 'Megan's mum'. And whilst bringing up a child is an incredibly rewarding, wonderful experience (not to mention emotionally draining and physically exhausting), you lose something of yourself in the process, the transition from 'me' to 'mum'. This is something you only notice over time, people you meet focus on the baby and your conversations as adults become an after-thought. Your responsibility as a mum means you put the baby first, their needs overshadow any needs you have as an individual and, over time, you almost forget what it is you want anyway. It almost becomes the easier option, you do not have to make decisions based around your needs, it is simply about what the baby needs next (Woollett & Pheonix 1991).

It was only after five months that the tiredness eased, the fog lifted and I began to think with clarity. And while I was a very happy and extremely proud parent, I began to crave what I can only describe as 'more' than my current situation allowed (Deci & Ryan 1985). I began to think about my current lived experience of motherhood and reflected on what I wanted to do moving forward, who I wanted to be, and the answer was 'me again'. I missed the part of my life that had been shelved after Megan was born. I missed the ritual of employment, putting on smart clothes, driving to work, responding to e-mails, planning classes, motivating students…..each aspect of the job took on a renewed appeal as I considered with relish the feeling of being valued (Bailey 2000). As I write this I am conscious that for me to say I felt I had value and worth in work, suggests that it was lacking whilst I was at home. I think this is probably true. Being a mum is often described

as a ‘thankless task’ and my own view reinforces this. There are no congratulations on a job well done, no appraisal, no feedback, there is just the satisfaction that you have a clean, happy, bathed and fed baby at the end of every day (Arendell 2000).

The journey to motherhood is incredibly personal, challenging and emotional as your whole sense of identity mutates and the complex decision making involved is dictated by your experiences and situations as you try to juggle multiple roles of mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, employee and colleague (Turner 1987). As you adapt and develop a new sense of cohesion and direction, your sense of self also repositions to allow for the new identity of ‘mother’ to evolve (Bailey 1999). It is only through this reflexive approach to my own research, the autoethnographic writing of my lived experience, that I am able to consider how I felt during this time (Ellis & Bochner 2000). The identity transition is not something I thought much about, yet it had an impact on all aspects of my life, my work role, how my friends viewed me, my position within the family, all of my existing in-groups shifted to accommodate the ‘new me’.

Over time I started to crave the mental challenge of work, the acknowledgement of my peers that I was an intellectual equal, someone whose opinion was worth listening to. Being on maternity leave for nine months, being out of work left me feeling out of touch and with that, crept feelings of inadequacy (Baumeister & Leary 1995). Had things changed? Would I still feel involved? Could I catch up? Some fears were due to mere dents in confidence stemming from time away, but some were real concerns – could I speak articulately for an hour after just four hours sleep? Could I remember relevant theoretical perspectives when I had spent the last nine months recounting nursery rhymes and songs? These ‘return dilemmas’ considered motherhood in dispute with the working woman concept and left me questioning my role in both domains (Millward 2006).

I think as a woman working in a then male-dominated media sector, I have always been conscious of proving myself, feeling I have to go over and above to ensure success at what I do. I always had a sense that the men I worked with had lower expectations of women. There was always an undercurrent of misogyny that never fully reared its ugly head, but

hummed away quietly in the background, reminding me to out-perform my male colleagues to 'prove' my worth in the organisation. These feelings stayed with me when I moved into academia and when I looked around the table at the people in my department, I was the only female and therefore the only one to go on maternity leave. I was also the only one with a small child to care for as my male colleagues who had families of their own had older children (Gardner 2013; Pyke 2013). I felt I had to 're-validate' myself, to prove myself all over again and return to work a 'new improved' version of myself, to somehow make up for my absence and demonstrate I was still capable (Millward 2006). This feeling of needing to prove myself was reinforced by the fact that I worked in an all-male department. No-one else had or planned to take leave to care for a new-born baby. Whilst I was away plans were made, careers were advanced and the department recruited new members of staff. I was fearful of being considered as a periphery member of the team, someone who was deemed not fully committed as I now had responsibilities outside of the workplace that outweighed those of the lecturer role. I felt the challenge would be to reconcile the demands of work with family (Grady & McCarthy 2008).

My plan to return and impress everyone with my professionalism and intellect was put on hold as five months after Megan was born I found out I was pregnant again and returned to work briefly, feeling as if I was 'letting the side down', before embarking on another stint of maternity leave. The feelings I had at the prospect of returning to work with one child doubled as the reality of working full-time with two children under two years of age sank in. Sleep deprivation was used as a form of torture in some countries and I can see why. I walked around in a permanent state of jetlag with a brain that felt like mush and the memory of a goldfish.

Whether it was to make up for the feelings of academic inadequacy or fear of failure, I felt I needed a badge of approval, something new to prove myself all over again, to remind people that I had something to offer, and for me, postgraduate qualifications were that badge. They were the equivalent of me marching around my workplace with a placard saying 'I might have had 2 kids but I'm still up to the job' (Halpert & Burg 1997). I feel I should point out I felt happy and fulfilled in my personal life, I love my children and had

a great network of friends and family, it was the work element of my life that was driving me to seek out a marker of achievement. I know I am not unique in this, I have friends who have been through the same, using postgraduate education as a means to help shape their lives, to provide them with a new career more suited to their circumstance, to give them a step up when returning to work after maternity leave, to 'prove' to colleagues that they are still capable or to give their sense of self another dimension outside of their familial responsibilities (Deci & Ryan 1985).

I enrolled on a PhD with much trepidation. The thought of beginning something that could take me six years to complete was daunting, the thought of being exposed as someone 'not up to it' academically was terrifying, the thought of starting it then not coping, letting down people who had invested time in me was worrying and the logistics of juggling work, study and my children (not to mention 'life' in general) was overwhelming. Yet I still enrolled. I was driven by a need to prove myself, at this stage to anyone who knew me but as time went on, it became a need to prove it to myself more than anyone else (Deci & Ryan 1985).

I was determined to compartmentalize my life into work, PhD and family/friends, desperate not to let any one thing override the rest. This is obviously very naive and there have been time over the past five years when each key element has taken over and taken most of my focus. It's often short-lived and I have learnt to accept it but it brings with it strong feelings of guilt (Elvin-Nowak 1999; Stone & Lovejoy 2004). I often feel frustrated at the lack of time I have to do anything PhD related. I have all of these thoughts spinning around my head but no time to process them. I dream of having days of nothing but reading, to absorb literature, to reflect on it and its relevance to my study. Instead I am in a constant state of mild panic; it sounds dramatic, but I clutch at little windows of opportunity, a few hours here and there are gifts and make a big difference but it doesn't take away the frustration. I know what I have to do, I just want the time to be able to do it. I am lucky, I have a very supportive partner and wonderful parents who are just as wonderful as grandparents and whose involvement in my children's lives have made the whole process easier to manage, but the difficulties do not go away.

I didn't actually expect to enjoy the PhD as much as I have. It surprises me. I thought that with everything I have going on in my life, doing a PhD would just add to the stress and despite wanting to do it, the stress would lead to me ultimately hating it. I started the process from a neutral position thinking that within a year I would feel negatively towards it but I have developed a love for the process, the reading, the knowledge gained. I completely underestimated the effect doing a PhD would have on me and my self-esteem. It makes me feel good about myself (Deci & Ryan 1985). When I'm lugging shopping in from the car having battled from work to the supermarket to the after-school club to home, knowing I have a ton of washing to do, dinner to prepare, lunches to make…..the list goes on but the thought of the PhD ensures I do not feel lost in the drudgery of tasks. I still feel as if there's something I'm doing that's challenging and stimulating and that's what helps, that's what stops me getting frustrated with the unrewarding tasks because they are not all I'm about, I have something else. This reflects the work of Greenhaus & Powell (2006) who found that 'role accumulation' where one finds satisfaction from both work and family responsibility leads to increased life satisfaction and perceived quality of life.

The difficulties however are…….difficult. They stem from not having the PhD as the centre of your universe. The PhD is just another plate that I'm spinning. Each aspect of my life is a spinning plate on a stick. As a child I watched someone doing this on television, the person would dart from one wobbling plate to another, checking, steadying, re-spinning before leaping to the next, they never stopped, never took their eyes from the plates. It was seen as an amazing trick, to maintain a steady spin from all plates at once. This is the image I have in my head when I consider my life. I am in amongst plates spinning on sticks, plates for the kids, work, family, friends, home, PhD. There is a sense of conflict in everything I do (Guendouzi 2006), a feeling of just scraping by, I'm not cooking big hearty Delia Smith casseroles and making intricate costumes for themed days in school, it's pasta and a polyester outfit hastily ordered from Amazon. It's 'skin of my teeth' on a daily basis. I'm very conscious of how much I rush. It was very telling when my daughter, then five, told me that she liked Sundays best because we didn't have to do anything quickly. But if I slow down the plates start to wobble.

The problem with having the PhD as a plate is that my involvement with that plate is sporadic. There are no days of leisurely reading journal articles, pondering their meaning and possible relevance to my work. I snatch slices of time, go two steps back to remember where I was up to then just as I am getting into my 'stride', time is up, life has to resume and the research is left on the stick to spin some more. This lack of uninterrupted time is a major hurdle. Lack of head space is another.

Having a good support network has enabled me to get work done but it isn't exhaustive and as a result, the so-called 'student experience' has passed me by. I work, I have children and familial responsibilities and the little spare time I make is spent writing and researching, I don't therefore have the luxury of attending student forums, postgraduate training seminars, networking events and conferences. I therefore miss out on the community side of Higher Education, I don't hear how other students are feeling, what they are researching, methods they are using and how they are dealing with the whole PhD process. The normative communities of practice for PhD students is therefore not an option for me and yet these are things the literature says are important to the process of studying in H.E., the feeling of belonging to an academic community of practice, being able to share ideas and experiences and know that you are not alone in how you are feeling (Lave & Wenger 1991; Leonard 2001; Phillips & Pugh 1998).

I looked for an insight into how women like me dealt with the whole PhD journey but there was nothing in the literature that covered the experiences of mothers studying for a research degree. How they felt, how it affected their lives, how their experiences shaped who they were. For me, this is the starting point of my study, to hear other women's stories, to understand their situations, to empathise and relate whilst at the same time learning about the decision making process. What it is that drives them, that makes them study despite time constraints and familial responsibilities, what is it that they think postgraduate education can do for them and if and how it has had an impact on their identities and their lives. In understanding the lived experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, their accounts can possibly inform other women considering embarking

on such a journey and can help H.E. institutions explore how they could improve the process for this particular cohort.

This autoethnographic account was written to support the notion of subjectivity within the work. As the researcher was in a similar position to the participants, a mother studying for a part-time PhD, she felt it was important to acknowledge there may be subjective influence in collection and interpretation of data (Anderson 2006; Ellis 2004; Gergen & Gergen 2002; Muncey 2010). In highlighting potential subjectivity, it demonstrates transparency, identifying myself as a member of the respondents' group. This recognition of me as a visible actor within the written text also provides a sense of equality, I am openly discussing my own experiences rather than just listening to accounts of others. In exposing myself this way, I hope to demonstrate a willingness to position myself alongside the other participants' lived experiences.

I found writing so honestly about my feelings about the process very daunting and I was very aware of how other people's interpretations of my account could be negative. My worries stemmed from the fact that I was very conscious of the criticisms of autoethnography, it being considered self indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey 1999) with the purpose being a need for affirmation of self-worth (Tedlock 2000) rather than providing a positive dimension to the understanding of the subject matter. Writing an honest account of my own feelings about the process was therefore difficult, I felt I was opening myself up for potential disapproval, judgement and negative responses. I initially considered evocative autoethnography, but this is a very descriptive, self-focused approach and as I felt my account should add to, rather than be the focal point of the research, I felt analytic autoethnography was more appropriate for me and for the study. This approach allowed for analytic reflexivity, theoretical analysis and a dialogue beyond the self. I felt this then limited the potential for accusations of self-indulgence.

This autoethnographic account also informs the methodology of the study, because through the process of writing a reflexive piece, I was able to reflect on the themes of motivation, identity and student experience which became the a priori themes for the

template analysis. These themes, alongside those of guilt, self-belief, H.E. infrastructure and the impact of the PhD on the women's lives, have formed a framework for the following findings.

6.3 Learning as Doing: Motivation

6.3.1 Introduction

Intrinsic motivation is based on the organismic need to be competent and self-determining (Ryan & Deci 1985) and can be measured through the concept of 'free choice', participants complete a task and are then rewarded or not. Once told they no longer have to do the task and the extrinsic reason to complete the task has gone, those that continue with the task are described as intrinsically motivated. When considering the mothers in this study, all describe an inner desire to continue with the PhD despite the lack of extrinsic motivating factors and often with obstacles ranging from lack of time to isolation. What keeps them going is the intrinsic motivation to succeed. They wanted to establish a sense of control over their actions, doing something for themselves and all had a belief that they were capable of more and wanted to prove to themselves that they could do it.

Reflecting the work of Wenger (2008) and the four components of learning, it has been identified in this study that the practice of undertaking a part-time PhD is what Wenger describes as 'learning as doing'. This suggests that for communities of practice to succeed and sustain a member's involvement, there has to be a community of people who are motivated by their participation. This motivation comes from the individual's own desire to learn and to share this knowledge gained with others. Thus for the women to gain from belonging to a community of practice, no matter how peripheral their involvement, they must demonstrate an intrinsic desire to continue with their studies despite outside pressures and constraints. This is the situation described by the women in this study, they felt an internal need to achieve more than their current situation provided and they viewed part-time PhD study as a vehicle for a sense of autonomy in their lives (Deem& Brehony 2000; Peters 2000), a new challenge and the opportunity to share their new-found knowledge with like-minded individuals.

'The challenge is great. You know, you can get so lost in being all those other roles, and especially the role of parent can be so all consuming, it's nice to have something that is just yours, that's just for you.' (Cath)

'I don't do anything for myself, and looking at this…this is proving to myself that I can do this. I guess I see it as my own development, my own understanding, this is me now, this is my time.' (Joanne)

'I just wanted to do something that was for me. Just completely separate from work and things that I do every day.' (Lynette)

Utilizing Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan 1985) as a framework the researcher has considered the motivations of the mothers in this study, what it is that drives them to embark on a research degree despite what Merrill in her work on mature women returners, describes as the 'complexities, interconnections, contradictions and juxtaposition of University and family life' (Merrill 1999:202). If basic needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness are not met it is argued that motivation will diminish, leading to alienation and poor performance (Deci *et al.* 1991). It has been argued that doctoral students undertake research for intrinsic, extrinsic or strategic reasons (Meyer *et al.* 2005). However, Deem & Brehony (2000) identify part-time students as more likely to be doing research for personal development reasons, rather than for employment opportunities or goals of becoming an academic. As all of the mothers in this study are part-time, the intrinsic motivation is what will be explored in greater detail in this section.

6.3.2 Autonomy

'Events that were found to undermine intrinsic motivation are events that most people encounter regularly in their daily lives. These forces, the pressures to get the kids to school and themselves to work, the deadlines and time pressures are all aspects of peoples' lives that can leave them feeling pushed around' (Deci 1995:33). It is understandable therefore, how the women in this study sought to re-claim some control, some interest outside the rigid framework of their lives by undertaking a task they saw as completely autonomous, a challenge that allowed them feelings of competence and self-worth.

> *'It is something that's just for you. Because a lot of stuff you do…You go to ASDA, you have to take your children, and yeah… But I think with a PhD…it is really…I really like that it's something that you're doing that not everybody else knows about, and it's new, and it's exciting, sometimes, and yeah, it is good, it's worth doing.' (Stephanie)*

> *'It just gives you that something other than being mum, you know what I mean? Because it can be hard, you know, some days when you fall out of bed and you're running to school and doing twenty odd loads of washing a week, and I'm just trying to have something different from that.' (Joan)*

> *'My husband was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He's had two lots of surgery and he's got epilepsy, so he's not been able to drive…he's struggled at work, because he's not been…they were supportive at first, and then they weren't. So we've had lots of periods of stress, but actually, this is what is keeping me going. It's the only thing that I've actually got that I can control and is mine, and I want to carry on.' (Joanne)*

These comments from the women demonstrate the role of the PhD in providing them with a challenge that enables an escape from their existing routine. This shift to an academic environment and potential membership of a community of practice instilled high levels of

intrinsic motivation as they identified learning as a vehicle for personal growth and self-expression. Participation in communities of practice enables members to shape their PhD experience, Wenger describes it as 'transformative potential' (Wenger 2008:56) and deems it important for the motivation of participants. Gruner (2009:128) in her personal narrative about PhD study, describes not wanting to be a 'head on a stick' and explains the need to work and to be a mum as a 'whole life, a life of both the mind and the body'. This reflects the thinking of the women in this study, autonomy was highlighted by all of the women as a driving force for them doing the PhD. They describe wanting to focus on something that was 'theirs'.

> *'Because you have given birth, you have been selfless. You know, we've given ourselves…you give, give, give as a mother and as a partner, and sometimes you think, "No one has actually given me anything back." And maybe you just lose the knack of noticing when you need to be selfish. And there has to be a point where you're demonstrating to your family "Actually, this is for me. This is something I want for me''. And why shouldn't I…? You know, my kids need to see that a mother can do that as well.' (Grace)*

> *'I wanted to do something for myself, something that wasn't anything to do with the kids.'(Paula)*

> *'It was for me. Nobody else, just for me. I'm not even going to say I'm going to use it, or likely to use it. I did it for me. To prove to myself that I could do it'. (Patricia)*

> *'It's for me, isn't it? It is for me. I really…The biggest thing is that sense of achievement for me, that I've done it and proving that I can do this to myself, I'm not really interested in appealing to other people. I don't feel the need to let everyone know how intelligent I am or…do you know what I mean? I'd like to know that I could do it. That I could prove that I could do it to myself.' (Lynette)*

Thirty of the women in this study worked, twenty-two of whom were in full-time employment. Despite the women discussing the esteem benefits of working (Bailey 2000), being in employment was not enough for their own sense of accomplishment. The women respondents had a drive for something that employment alone could not satisfy. The autonomy that doctoral study demands led the women to consider this path as one which could re-ignite their sense of efficacy and self-belief. The socially constructed assumptions around gender and specifically motherhood had made it difficult for the women to undertake the doctorate without considerable concern for their existing responsibilities in the private domain (Lemkau & Landau 1986; Rotkirch *et al.* 2009). However, their need for an 'individual self-concept' that would define them as independent of others was strong enough to push them towards enrolling on a doctorate (Burke & Stets 2009).

> *'I think having a chronic illness became a bit of a life changing experience, in one way a positive, because I would have never gone down the PhD road otherwise. But it was making sure I was doing something for me… I had gone from being active and very outdoors, I found that I couldn't do that anymore. So I wanted to have something that was still mine, not anybody else's, not the kids', not my husband's, or work's or anybody else's, just something that was purely for me, a selfish bit of me that I kept my identity.' (Paula)*

This desire for further study, despite the time constraints, demonstrates the value the women placed on education and the concept of learning as doing (Cox 2003; Wenger 2008). They all had busy lives, loving families and 30 out of the 35 were in positions of employment, yet personally they were striving for more. They were looking for personal achievement in something they felt was the ultimate challenge and they selected the PhD because it was considered to be exactly that. This is highlighted by Leonard *et al.* (2005) who identify that intellectual and emotional growth are one of the key benefits of doctoral education.

'The study is purely for me. I've got no sort of future ambition with it as such. It was "I like research, I like to study, so that's what I'm going to do'', for me. If it leads on to something else, that's great, but it's not a sort of "I must do this in order to get to here.''(Moyra)

'I would say, ''Do it." But do it for the right reasons. Not because you're told to do it. Do it for you. Do it for you, and do it because you want to do it.' (Naomi)

The women were all very clear about their motivations for embarking on the PhD however they acknowledged the difficulty of balancing their own desires for an education with what they saw as their other responsibilities which took priority, as McBride (1990) suggests, many women give up their autonomy to accommodate others.

'I'm a wife, I'm a mum, I've got a full-time job, and for me, I don't know if the other women you've spoken to have said different, but for me, the PhD is always put to one side. Always on the back burner.' (Therese)

The balancing of roles and priorities is evidenced later in the research on part-time study, as the women express the frustration at what they describe as 'juggling' their numerous responsibilities. Building on the theme of autonomy, the next area identified by Deci & Ryan (1985) as key to intrinsic motivation is competence, the need to feel capable of something not currently in an existing repertoire of abilities.

6.3.3 Competence

Intrinsic motivation considers the rationale for an individual engaging with a task to be the inherent satisfaction of completing that task rather than because of any external pressures or rewards. The level of intrinsic motivation depends on the individual and the activity, definitions of intrinsic motivation therefore range from how interesting the activity is to the person, to how much satisfaction they gain from it (Ryan & Deci 2000). This level of intrinsic motivation is linked to competence, which is defined with communities of practice literature as a combination of learning experientially and socially (Wenger 2008). The experience of learning therefore requires an individual to identify as competent in their own ability and knowledge as well as demonstrating competence within the context of a community of practice. If the opportunity to realign learning and knowledge with others is not available, an individual's motivation can be diminished. This is important for the sustained motivation of the women in this study to be involved in a PhD community of practice, to experience mutual engagement and ascertain competence.

> *'I think it needs to be something that you want to give up things to do, that you want to look forward to writing. I think if it's something that's seen as a chore, then unless you've got an iron self-control, you're not going to do it or you're going to resent it. I think it's got to be something that deeply motivates you.' (Trish)*

The desire for feelings of competence, to feel more than good at being a mum, pushes women to seek out challenges beyond their previous experience. 'People, impelled by the need to feel competent, engage in activities to simply expand their own sense of accomplishment' (Deci 1995:65). It is this sense of competence that is a key factor in mutual engagement (Wenger 2008) as it connects participants through what they know but also what they do not know. In sharing knowledge, the competence of an individual increases, leading to increased motivation to participate and sustain the community of practice (Cox 2005; Duguid 2008; Raz 2007).

'I like challenges. I like to keep my brain busy. It was always deep rooted "I wonder if I'm capable of it." (June)

'It can be argued there is an important psychological need beyond autonomy that underlies intrinsically motivated behaviour. People, impelled by the need to feel competent, might engage in various activities simply to expand their own sense of accomplishment' (Deci 1995:65). If an individual finds a task easy, there is no sense of accomplishment, the task must be seen as a challenge, something that pushes the individual's abilities. Many of the women described not knowing whether they were up to it, the word frequently used was 'challenge' but they had an inner belief and wanted, through the PhD, to demonstrate a competence and capability intellectually.

'My dad's not been one to encourage education, it's a case of "Why do you want to do something like that?" Every time I do something, it's "Are you finished now? You're not doing more bloody education! What do you want to do that for?" Like I said, I think I like the challenge. I want to prove to myself I can do it.' (Mary Ann)

The need for something more than their current lives were offering was a common theme among the women's rationale for undertaking a PhD. There was a need for re-affirming a competence beyond their existing accomplishments, which appeared to have been over-shadowed by the requirements of the role of mother. 'Many highly competent women feel themselves stagnating in the face of inescapable routine and repetition' (Josselson 1996: 193). This is reinforced by the socially constructed assumptions around motherhood that women should be satisfied with their role, rather than seek out alternative routes for individual enhancement that takes them away from the private domain (Marshall 1991). The women therefore considered PhD study as providing another dimension to their lives. They saw research students as belonging to a community of practice that they wanted to be a part of, reflecting what Wenger describes as a social learning system whereby newcomers, like the women in this study, want to become 'one of them', the existing PhD

students, and in doing so, 'align their experience with the competence defined by existing members' (Wenger 2000:227).

> *'I just wanted to go as far as I could. I had to prove to myself that I could go as far as I could. And it definitely does stem back to school, because I think, in a lot of ways, I was written off completely.'(Patricia)*

The social context that the women undertook their study played an important part in supporting competence and autonomy. Evaluations and imposed goals used by institutions to monitor progress are seen as undermining intrinsic motivation as they are not the student's choice and can be perceived as controlling (Rigby *et al.* 1992). They also do not reflect the lifestyle and experience of what is typically a mature student who is already in employment and has no requirement for 'workplace skills training' and progression reporting. This reflects the work of James (2007:135) who identifies potential problems when new members of a community of practice already have existing expertise and experience in cognate fields as they 'enter as novices but already have established old-timer credentials elsewhere'. These issues around institutional infrastructure and administration will be discussed in a later chapter on student experience. According to Wenger (2008), a sense of competence is linked not only to the requirement of skills and knowledge but also incorporates the ability to engage with other members, to take responsibility for the continuation of the community of practice and the engagement in a shared repertoire. Thus the role of relatedness is key to an increased sense of competence within PhD study, with students needing to engage with others as well as engaging with their subject through their own research. It is only through mutual engagement that true feelings of competence develop (Wang 2010).

6.3.4 Relatedness

> 'Women derive their sense of competence and therefore identity, from within an interpersonal web. For a woman to have real identity-forming engagement, she needs to feel interconnected with others in a way that seems meaningful and personally enhancing' (Josselson 1996:195).

Having a connection with other people, being part of a community of practice and not feeling alone in what you undertake is a key factor in sustaining motivation (Lave & Wenger 1991). Therefore, it was important for the women in this study to contribute actively to the PhD community of practice, as participation, no matter how peripheral, leads to value both in terms of how one values the community of practice and how the community of practice values individuals (Brooks 2010). Thus part of the motivation for learning for the women is alignment to the shared repertoire and joint enterprise of the PhD community of practice. However, as demonstrated by the findings of this research, the women in this study did not experience these connections with others. Many described feelings of isolation, feeling alone in the process and lacking the contact with peers in a similar position. This lack of relatedness is therefore a potential obstacle for women as a lack of connection can affect the motivation of a student.

> *'I didn't know anyone else to speak to.' (Jo)*

Hill & Macgregor (1998) identify families, work colleagues, peers, supervisors and friends as the five strong influences on a woman during part-time study. If women are lacking representation and support from these groups, they miss out on feelings of relatedness which can, in turn, affect their levels of motivation to continue with their studying. Lack of a sense of relatedness can therefore have an impact on the women's sense of cohesion to a group and ultimately their motivation to continue. In the classroom, feelings of relatedness come from the student's relationship with the teacher, whether they feel valued and respected (Niemiec & Ryan 2009). When considering the PhD process, the aspect of relatedness is linked to the support networks provided by the University to

guide the student through their autonomous learning journey. The interpersonal involvement required to satisfy the need for relatedness will only enhance motivation if the people involved support an autonomous process (Grolnick & Ryan 1989). Identifying support systems in advance of embarking on a PhD would enable women to establish a framework of relatedness that would offer support throughout the process, providing them with a more positive start and therefore a better chance of continuing through to completion. Without the necessary infrastructure in place, studying for a PhD can become a very lonely and isolating existence (Gardner & Gopaul 2012).

'I will graduate, and no one from the university will know who I am.' (Grace)

This study found that most women felt the PhD process was isolating due to their circumstances, yet they continued with the PhD despite the lack of connectedness with like- minded individuals. This was a big factor in the motivation of the women taking part in this research. Many described feelings of isolation, feeling alone in the process and lacking the contact with peers in a similar position (Pyhalto *et al.* 2012). Their experience was therefore one of marginalization.

> *'It's not unique to do this, but I think people are scattered and there's no network, you can't access anybody that's doing a part-time PhD as a mother anywhere, there's no blog, there's nowhere you can go to feel support at times of crisis, because I'm sure this journey is a normal journey…Hopefully…But there's no way to access anyone, there's no structures that say, "There's a group of women who are doing this, go in there, meet up and have a coffee", you know, and then you'd feel normal. You just feel like you're a bit mad. And all the statistics say that everybody fails, you know, why would you do it?' (Jan)*

Relatedness, the feeling of connecting with like-minded individuals is an essential part of motivation and was acknowledged by the women as a key part of the PhD process that they missed out on. This can have a negative impact on their motivation overall as the isolation can become overwhelming, leaving them feeling alone in the process with no

means of peer reassurance (Hildreth *et al.* 1998). This lack of interaction and communication can have detrimental effects on the women's sense of belonging to a community of practice and ultimately their progress with the PhD as they miss the 'social energy' shared practice can generate (Wenger 2008:84). They lack mutual engagement and cannot maintain connections with other members, therefore failing to develop a shared repertoire that enhances feelings of competence. Relatedness is therefore crucial to the women's participation and sense of accomplishment yet was something they lacked in their experience of part-time PhD study.

> *'I think I miss the interaction with the other students, and I'd say that's probably the thing I miss the most.' (Joan)*

> *'It's difficult working on your own, not having people to bounce your ideas off. I'd be talking about it at home and nobody would have a clue what I was talking about, and my husband would say," Oh, that's nice." So I had nobody to talk about it with, so I missed that aspect of it. It's different when you're going into university every day and meeting people, but I think it's quite isolated, the PhD research.' (Patricia)*

When considering the experience of studying for a part-time Phd, a word often used by the women to describe their experience was lonely. Despite having a family, friends and work colleagues, it was deemed an existence that distanced them from those around them. It wasn't a physical loneliness, they lived with other people and saw them every day, the feelings of loneliness came from the lack of understanding of what they were going through. No-one around them fully understood what is was to study for a PhD whilst managing the numerous other demands placed on them. This lack of understanding led to a feeling of disconnectedness (McCulloch & Stokes 2008), which in turn, left the women questioning themselves and their ability. There was no reassurance that what they were thinking, feeling and experiencing was a normal part of the PhD process and this resulted in the women feeling they were on their own. As highlighted by De Welde and Laursen

(2011) it is important for women to know other women who are juggling multiple responsibilities.

> *'I didn't expect it to be quite as lonely as it is. And sometimes I feel you need just a bit of guidance along the pathway and just sometimes having a coffee or a conversation with someone is a help, and that doesn't really exist. Sometimes, for me, it is quite an isolating place to be.' (Kate)*

> *'I don't think I was prepared for it feeling so lonely. I think at times it felt like a very lonely occupation, and so trying to find the motivation for something that feels really hard and really lonely sometimes has been really hard. I just thought, "Why am I doing this.'' (Helen)*

The women felt they lacked a connection with others in a similar position, this was something they felt was key to their continued motivation. The word isolation was used in most of the interviews and whilst there may be times of physical distance from other people, the inference was that of isolation through a lack of connection and understanding. Practice as connection (Wenger 2008) is important for an individual's identity development and motivation in the PhD community of practice, without it learning can be impeded due to peripherality of participation. Therefore, the lack of connection the women in this study experienced could have serious consequences for their continued development as they lacked the mutual engagement required to progress.

> *'I didn't realise how isolating a PhD is. I expected more connection with other PhD students. You know, formal connections, more things that made it a more supportive experience.' (Grace*)

> *'Every now and again it would be nice to…just an informal cup of coffee with someone, with people, like-minded people who have the same sort of challenges, but just have a bit of a moan and swap notes about any hints or tips. I think that would be nice.' (Cecilia)*

Whilst the women expressed frustration at not being able to attend the more formal communities of practice established by the institution, they were actually more motivated by attending the informal communities of practice. They highlighted opportunities to talk to other students and 'chats over coffee' as important elements during the process that they missed out on. It would seem that informal peer support and acknowledgement is a key driver in establishing a sense of competence in the women, enabling them to learn through social participation (Parker *et al* 2012). Those who did have a network or group of people doing PhDs felt a lot more positive about their experience overall. An environment that reinforces a supportive community of scholarly caring to H.E. is one that many female students feel is conducive to aiding completion of a PhD (Heinrich *et al.* 1997; Pemberton & Akkay 2010). The women all said however, that although full-time students had established a community, the part-time students, due to external commitments, experienced a lack of connectedness and a feeling of not really belonging. Those who had structured sessions with other students spoke of feeling supported and motivated by their peer network.

The structured sessions were part of an Education doctorate that one of the women, Naomi, was enrolled on. Students were required to attend weekend residentials at key times during the year. At these compulsory sessions students attended lectures and workshops and were provided structured tasks relating to their research. They also had essays to write as part of the overall programme, providing them with formative feedback throughout the process, thus enabling them to understand thoroughly what was required of them and how to build on their competence as researchers. It also provided a much needed opportunity to talk to other people doing the same programme, discuss ideas, share experiences and connect with people who understand the challenges of doctoral study. Thus developing a shared repertoire whereby ways of doing things, stories and concepts combine and a discourse is developed by members to aid identity expression within the community of practice (Brooks 2010).

> *'I don't think I would have completed it if I'd had to do it on my own, without those weekends, feeling part of something.' (Naomi)*

Whilst compulsory weekends away would be difficult for many of the women in this study to manage, the benefits are a good argument to include a small number of compulsory sessions within the traditional PhD structure. Some Universities do offer these intensive study weekends which take into account many peoples' working lives, but the family sacrifice that comes with not being there of a weekend is a difficult scenario for many.

> *'They put on training weekends for us, there's one coming up actually later this month, with accommodation provided if you need it, so you have four days to devote to your study. But this is not easy when you're a mum of course.' (Eileen)*

Whilst a large number of residential opportunities may be unmanageable, an example of how to encourage students to connect then stay connected despite distance was identified by Paula who was enrolled on a PhD programme with a University that established an on-line learning community. The students all met online then had to go to a residential within the first month. Meeting face-to-face, discussing research ideas and getting to know each other without the distractions of daily life enabled the students to connect with each other. The on-line community then allowed them the opportunity to interact with one another, arrange informal meetings and support each other through the process. Discussions on-line led to off-line gatherings, the students developed trust and began peer reviewing each other's work. These connections grew into friendships as discussions about the PhD led to talk about more personal issues as the PhD was adapted into everyone's lives. This 'practice as connection' allows participants to form close relationships, develop repertoires and an understanding of their enterprise that outsiders may not share (Wenger 2008:113), thus providing a much needed sense of relatedness and ultimately enhanced motivation.

> *'They are a great bunch, you know that you only have to post a quick comment and someone will get back to you, even if it's just to ask if you are ok.' (Paula)*

Lynette was the student representative and organized for the PhD students to all meet up one Saturday a month. They would all work on their research but it provided them with the opportunity to discuss their work and feel that they weren't alone in the process. These sessions were not compulsory but were popular with the students as it enabled them to share experiences. She also arranged a social activity twice a year to further enhance the connection between the students.

> *'It helps when you know you aren't the only one.' (Lynette)*

Students who attended conferences described feeling 'fired up' yet these feelings were short lived and once they returned back to their everyday roles the academic interaction created a feeling of distance.

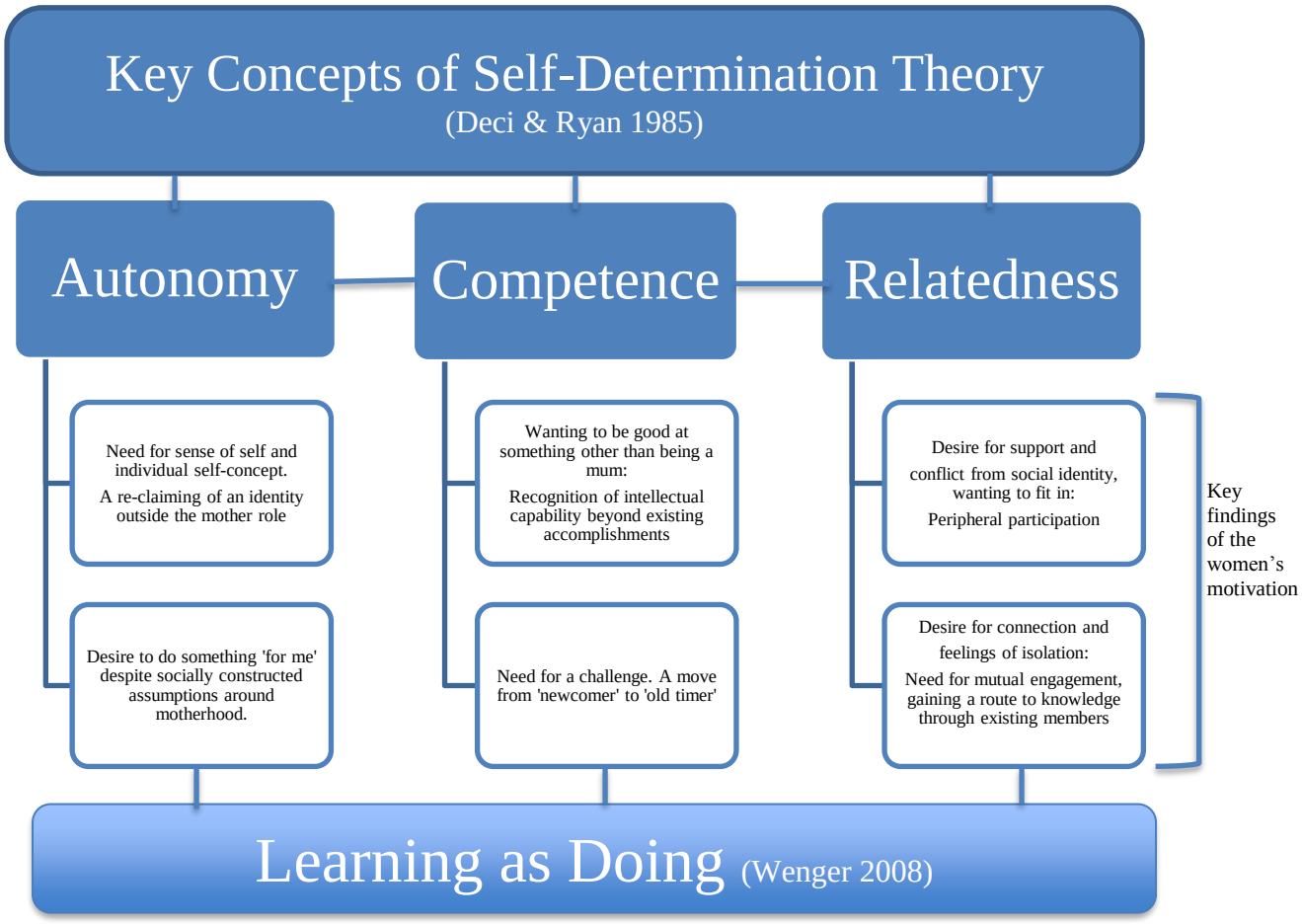
> *'Going to conferences is great, and connecting with other people, to keep that identity. I think I'd be dead without them as a part-time researcher because they make me feel like an academic.' (Eileen)*

> *'I've spoken at quite a few conferences and you do need that to encourage you really, because there's lots of times where you're drowning in the depth of papers or data, where you just think, ''is it actually worth it?'' (Heather)*

This shows how students who consider themselves to be part of the academic community tend to view their experience more positively, gaining satisfaction from the process overall (Pyhalto *et al.* 2012). However, due to their life circumstances, work and familial responsibility, many of the women respondents were denied this experience of connection and relatedness, leaving them feeling disconnected and at times, lacking motivation as a result. These findings therefore demonstrate that practice as connection plays an important role in establishing an individual's identity within the community of practice as they develop a shared repertoire based on a sense of relatedness with other participants. The mothers in this study were intrinsically motivated to continue and placed value on becoming a member of the community. This reflects self-determination and the notion of

autonomy, competence and relatedness driving individuals to continue with tasks regardless of extrinsic factors. It also reflects the issue of identity transition in the mothers as the move from peripheral to full member creates an increased sense of identity and belonging (Lave & Wenger 1991). Institutional infrastructure and support is clearly an issue that should be addressed to improve the communication and involvement of part-time students with children and will be discussed further within this study.

6.3.5 A Self-Determination Theory approach to the mother's motivation



This diagram reflects how self-determination theory mirrors the experiences and feelings of the women in this study. Their rationale for embarking on a part-time PhD was based on an intrinsic desire rather than extrinsic rewards. The diagram represents the three areas of self-determination theory and links them to the narrated experiences of the women who identified needing something more for themselves and recognized that the academic challenge of a part-time PhD would fulfill the intrinsic drive to do something that their current situation could not provide for them. The need for autonomy stemmed from the feeling the women had regarding the role of mother and how their sense of identity was absorbed into this role with little acknowledgement of an individual identity outside. Despite the guilt felt by the women, they pursued the desire to do something they described as 'for themselves'. Linked to this is their drive for a sense of competence, which grew from a need for intellectual recognition, allowing them to re-claim an identity beyond that of mother. By becoming a newcomer in the PhD community of practice, the women were entering an environment of intellectual stimulation, providing them with both a feeling of autonomy and competence as they were challenged to develop from peripheral participant to old-timer. This experience was however, inconsistent and often the women were unable to experience the relatedness aspect of SDT despite their need for a connection with like-minded individuals. The difficulty lay in their ability to participate in the PhD community of practice, as the need for mutual engagement and what Wenger (2008) describes as 'practice as connection' was impeded by a number of factors: institutional infrastructure and approach to part-time PhD students, employment, lifestyle and the numerous tensions and challenges brought by the mother role. This resulted in the women lacking an aspect of relatedness during the process of part-time PhD study and had a significant impact on their experience overall as a connection with others is crucial in sustaining motivation. The findings demonstrate that the women were unable to establish a framework of relatedness thus leaving them with feelings of isolation with no means of peer reassurance and shared practice. Developing a sense of relatedness can enhance feelings of competence and without it, the women doubted their ability in the process and felt disconnected from the PhD community of practice. The subject of relatedness brings issues of conflict which will be discussed in later chapters as the women expressed their own requirements for a connection yet felt their experience of this fell

short due to commitments of being a mother. Self-determination theory can therefore be utilized to explain the women's motivation for wanting to do a part-time PhD. The key concepts of autonomy, competence and relatedness link to Wenger's (2008) communities of practice theory, highlighting learning as doing as a key factor in the women's experience.

6.4 Learning as Becoming: Identity

6.4.1 Introduction

There is no definitive use of the word identity, it has many varied and contested meanings, and is interpreted and re-interpreted through narratives of everyday life (Lawler 2008). Due to the complex roles adopted by the women in this study, it is important to understand how they viewed these multiple identities and how they managed them. All of the women in this study identified a number of 'roles' or 'identities' that they adopted depending on the social context they were in. The social groups encompassing these roles were highlighted as having numerous traits or identifiable characteristics and behaviours. The core identities of mother, colleague, daughter, friend, wife/partner, PhD candidate were listed along with the subtle nuances of shifting identity characteristics between these roles without upsetting the group norms. This juggling of social identity is reflective of social identity theory (Tajfel 1974) which is a social psychological theory of inter-group relations and the self. The ideas centre around group membership and the behaviour and traits one feels one should display to belong to a particular group. Self-categorization theory is Turner's (1987) modification of social identity theory and will be used in this chapter as a framework to analyse how the women managed their multiple roles.

6.4.2 Loss and retrieval of self: From me to mum

Most of the women described a change in themselves when they became mums for the first time. They reflected on the people they were and how there was a noticeable shift in their thoughts and behaviour. It was described by June as a complete transformation, she uses the word metamorphosis to suggest not just a mental shift in terms of priorities but a physical change.

'It was a metamorphosis from a woman to a mother.' (June)

The main issues discussed by the women, focused on how they put their own activities, hobbies, and desires on hold and put the baby before anything else, they commented on the expectation that mothers will be selfless, forgoing their personal needs for their children's development (O'Reilly 2005). They reflected on how this differed to their partners, whose lives were not affected in the same way and it was observed that they could continue with their lives with minimal disruption.

> *'It's been kids first, PhD second, I'm right down at the bottom. I mean, as a mum you're at the bottom…And if you have animals, they're in front of you. And I think that's part of what changes with you from the women to the mother.' (June)*

> *'I felt as if I didn't have my own identity anymore, so I was "Matthew's mum." This is Patricia, Matthew's mum. I was never me on my own anymore.' (Patricia)*

> *'I've evolved. I've gone from being an individual with a career into being a mother…..a different kind of person really.' (Elizabeth)*

Mothers are viewed by society as key drivers in their child's development (O'Reilly 2005) and as a result, the women feel pressure to conform to the ideal mother role, adhering to the selfless image dictated by societal ideologies of how a mother should behave. This 'self-surveillance' (Lawler 2000) reinforces the 'code of goodness' (Bebko & Krestan 1990) that restricts a woman's desires to follow her own goals as to do so brings into question her ability as a mother.

> *'I felt harassed by society.' (Eileen)*

> *'I do think that people, when they hear you're a mum, if they don't know you or hadn't known you previously, there's an immediate kind of assumption of knowing what you are and who you are.' (Lynette)*

Women lose their voice due to social and cultural expectations that restrict their self-expression. In re-claiming their voice, women can express themselves often through multiple voices, reflecting multiple aspects of their identity (Hayes & Flannery 2002). Part of re-claiming who they are is re-defining their sense of self, establishing an identity outside of their existing roles and challenging the expectations that currently exist (Pheonix *et al.* 1991). These expectations around what mothers should do have a suffocating effect on women in society, who should be encouraged to flourish and become 'more' than they currently envisage their lives to be. As suggested by Wenger, 'learning transforms our identities' (2008:227) thus for the mothers in this study, the role of the PhD has been to provide them with a platform for self-discovery.

> *'Having a baby is the biggest challenge you'll ever have, isn't it? But it's a different type of challenge. I miss the intellectual side of it, I did want to be with my son, but I felt like I'd lost something of myself because I wasn't getting the interaction. I felt quite isolated, I felt like my brain was going.' (Therese)*

Despite the different ages, backgrounds, socio-economic groups and cultures, the women all had an intrinsic desire to remake who they were. Beck (1992) argues that there can be a shift from a socially prescribed biography to one that is self-produced without the restrictions of gender. The women in this study made the decision to overturn the traditional ways of being in relation to motherhood (Badinter 2011; Lawler 2000; Marshall 1991; Millar 2009; Pheonix *et al.* 1991; Rotkirch *et al.* 2009; Woolett & Pheonix 1991) by embarking on a doctorate despite the acknowledged tensions between the mother and student identity. Therefore, producing a new 'self-concept' (Darvill *et al.* 2008) that provided them with a level of autonomy and control in their lives.

> *'It's a platform for me to learn more about myself. As me. Not as a mum or a partner or anything. Just as me, as someone who wants to achieve an academic challenge.' (Grace)*

> *'I spent all this time with the family and I haven't had that much time on my own doing things that I want to do. Because a lot of my life has been spent bringing up children, coming and going to school and then bringing them to their various activities in the evening or whatever. And it's very restrictive on your own time and being able to do things yourself.' (Mary Ann)*

'Parenting as an unpaid occupation entails lower status, less power and less control of resources than paid work. Women's mothering reinforces and perpetuates women's relative powerlessness and is a product of behavioural conformity' (Chodorow 1978:31). The timing of the PhD is an interesting aspect as all but three of the women embarked on the process after they had children, the remaining three women began the PhD then became pregnant. This further supports the argument that self-determination is a leading factor in the women's motivation for study. Having children, although a life-enhancing, wonderful experience, left the women with a different sense of who they were. 'In forming and sustaining our identity, we build a bridge between who we feel ourselves to be internally and who we are recognized as being by our social world' (Josselson 1996:27). The pressures of being a good mum, of being selfless and prioritizing your child's needs leaves little time for the women's own interests. This shift can leave women questioning their own post-child identity in comparison with the pre-child person they were. Whilst it is natural, there was an identity shift during the transition to motherhood leaving the women in this study re-evaluating their own position, who they were and who they wanted to be (Baumeister & Leary 1995).

> 'Writers on motherhood see pregnancy and the birth process as a key influence on the experience of motherhood as a whole. They regard the process of bearing children as having an impact on mothers' self-esteem and sense of identity' (Gatrell 2005:53).

Society positions women with children as being a 'mum' before any other role they may fulfill. This mother discourse considers mothers to have the power to profoundly influence their child's development (O'Reilly 2005) placing emphasis on the mother to

take full responsibility for the child's welfare, leaving them with feelings of guilt and anxiety when they have to leave the child for their own employment or study demands. Women become defined by the mother role they fulfill and people's expectations of them are managed through societal understanding of what mother's should do and how they should behave.

> *'I don't think I have changed but I certainly think that I have become, to other people that don't necessarily know me, I've become a middle aged mum.'*
> *(Lynette)*

Wenger (2008) argues that communities of practice membership can affect one's identity. Being part of a community of practice results in a two-way communication with peripheral members learning from full members whilst these full members or 'old timers' can still develop their knowledge from the insights new or peripheral members can bring. One aspect of participation of new members is a shift in their identity as it is said that learning changes who we are (Wenger 2008). The women in this study demonstrated a desire to change their current identity so it encompassed more for them than their existing identities of mother, worker, friend, wife and family member. They expected that being part of a community of practice would result in an aspect of student identity yet their circumstances left them on the periphery or completely excluded from the community of practice and therefore lacking that sense of identity enjoyed by more full members of that community.

6.4.3 Self-Categorization Theory

Turner suggests that people have a repertoire of group memberships that 'both describe and prescribe one's attributes as a group member' (Hogg 1996:67). Each in-group has a shared social membership and associated stereotypes which consist of a range of beliefs and actions that are aligned with people in the group. Identity standards hold meanings that define who we are, guiding the actions of individuals who aspire to that identity (Burke & Stets 2009:89). Each of the women had an idea of what it was to be a mum, a student and a work colleague and attempted to control those perceived meanings and group identity through their behaviour. They encountered difficulties however, as the in-group characteristics of these communities of practice were not always easy to emulate and often led to the women feeling excluded as they lacked the opportunities, involvement, acknowledgement and knowledge required to participate fully.

> *'I think we all do have different identities, and we are different people in different scenarios. And I am really different, and I am quite conscious that I'm different. People at work have always said to me that I'm always very professional but they never really see me…… It's sad, but I think no one actually knows who I am, because I'm quite multi-faceted in many respects.' (Kate)*

> *'I find it very difficult sometimes changing the hats to meet different situations, you were never a great mum because you didn't go to all the mummies classes and do "Music with Mummies" and have coffee and you're not a great colleague because you don't go to the pub with other people from work, so everything you're doing, you're not quite doing as well as everybody else but trying to keep up, and I think that can be very isolating.' (Jan)*

According to Turner (1987) the key characteristics of each in-group are considered to define the individuals and align them with others in that group. This reflects the communities of practice framework which highlights some of the key characteristics of communities of practice membership 'a substantial overlap in participant's descriptions

of who belongs, mutually defining identities, certain styles recognized as displaying membership and a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world' (Wenger 2008:125-126). Both theoretical viewpoints consider group membership to be strongly influential regarding an individuals' identity. This reinforces the importance of belonging to groups or communities of practice to not only sustain and grow learning and knowledge for the PhD, it is also crucial to the women's personal development and identity formation away from their 'mother' role.

6.4.4 In-group membership

The concept of self within this framework comprises many different components. It assumes individuals possess multiple concepts of self which are 'switched on' in specific situations to produce a certain self-image. The in-group cohesion is caused by perceived similarity of the self and the other group members, based on the defining characteristics. 'As we engage in practice our identities encompass multiple perspectives' (Wenger 2008:161), we learn new ways of thinking and attribute new meanings to what we experience, therefore we reflect the many characteristics of the community of practice as our identities are shaped by our participation. Each social identity has a range of attributes and norms that reflect the group and in-group members feel positively about the group when members have similar traits. These traits form the basis of the social identity and create depersonalization of the self, whereby the individual sees their identity in line with the group traits rather than their own personality. Depersonalization sees people switch their self-concept to mirror the collective identity, without losing their individual identity (Turner 1987).

Rather than seeing themselves as an individual, the women perceive themselves in terms of the characteristics of the group, these traits are then considered as part of their identity, almost overriding their own personal identity. The women described the characteristics of the various identities they adopted in relation to themselves and their position within the in-groups. In an attempt to be perceived as 'fitting in' with the in-group, they often manipulated their own social and personal identity to change the perception of their

coherence with the group. 'A performer tends to conceal or underplay those activities, facts and motives which are incompatible with an idealized version of himself, in addition, a person often engenders in his audience the belief that he is related to them in a more ideal way than is always the case' (Goffman 1959:42).

> *'I think it just overcomplicates relationships sometimes. So, the new mummies that I've met, some of them know that I'm doing a PhD, but actually they struggled to work part time and bring their child up, so I don't want to throw in their face that I was working full time, doing a PhD and bringing a child up, so that's why I didn't mention it.' (Rachel)*

This process of continually adapting one's identity is key to the women's experience of doctoral study as they develop, through the different groups, a stronger sense of who they are and who they want to be.

> *'It's quite difficult when you're a lecturer at a university and you go to be a student at a university, it's quite fractured…Even what you wear, how you dress, what you say, you know, is very different. So I went and bought a different type of bag so I could look more student than professional.' (Jan)*

> *'I think it's like Shakespeare said, we put on different masks.' (Sokieta)*

> *'I think it's the conflict of the roles that are difficult.' (Jess)*

In line with Turner's Self-Categorization Theory which suggests we are all members of a variety of groups and adapt our characteristics accordingly, the communities of practice theory highlights how we are all in contact with a variety of communities of practice and have varying levels of participation in each. Wenger argues that we are 'constantly passing boundaries' (2008:165) from one community to another and as a result, our identity is not necessarily impacted by non-participation as not all groups are significant to us or to our

identity. Therefore, participation reflects membership, it does not necessarily reflect identity. It is when experiences of non-participation or 'peripherality' have an impact on the learning experience of members and their involvement in the mutual engagement, joint enterprise and use of shared resources that it then becomes an issue of identity as our peripherality impedes learning. The peripherality of the women in this study had a direct impact on their identities and their identification with the key communities of practice in their lives, the mums' in-group, the student in-group and the in-groups of work colleagues, friends and family. The PhD study provided a sense of distance from the other members of the mums' in-group, despite the women identifying their main identity as being that of 'mum' yet their role of mother was what often prevented them from being anything more than peripheral members of the other key community of practice in their lives, the student in-group. This conflict caused a perpetual peripherality (Wenger 2008) that had a significant impact on the women's identity and sense of who they were and where they belonged. Each group had traits that the women disassociate with and traits that they identify as key to that group. They strive for them but feel that they often fall short of the 'ideal' characteristics thus causing role confusion as they never feel they are a legitimate member of that in-group. All of the women spoke of the role conflict they experienced as a woman and a mother working and or studying. The conflict of wanting to be a 'good mum' to adhere to the in-group characteristics defined in the following sections, but at the same time striving for an identity outside of the in-group, trying to maintain an aspect of the person they were before they had children.

> *'You've got this conflicted identity as a part time researcher and a mum, where it is on the back burner.' (Eileen)*

> *'I felt before I gave birth, I was a person and I could do all these things, and then afterwards I was just John's wife and Daisy's mom. I always thought I was more than that. So it's…I don't mind being a wife and a mom, but… there's so much more that defines me. So I feel like I was pegged suddenly. And the only conversation people have with me now is "Oh, when's the next one?" (Sokieta)*

6.4.5 In-group - Mums

As stated earlier, people depersonalize and take on the characteristics associated with a particular social group, aligning themselves with the collective identity. The women in this study internalized the stereotypes that defined the mum's in-group then defined themselves based on those characteristics. They discussed their frustrations at the limitations of the social stereotype 'ideal' mum identity and listed traits that defined the group such as cooking from scratch, having a tidy house, attending school functions, organizing play dates, attending school plays and having coffee with other mums,

> *'I think some people expected me to, I don't know, almost stop and make do. You know, your life is sort of now complete because you have a child.' (Moyra)*

> *'I think people are surprised if they find out I'm doing a PhD, because I'm just another mum like them.' (Stephanie)*

The women either attempted to fit in by avoiding talking about the PhD or 'playing it down' or simply avoided in-group membership to what a few of the women referred to as 'the mummies' club', as they didn't feel they could satisfy the defining characteristics. This avoidance of other mums or avoidance of conversation topics outside of the children were the common mechanisms of the women managing the 'mums' in-group.

> *'You've got lots of the other mums that are out doing nights out, talking about clothes talking about all of that, and they think you're some sort of freak that's a bit weird, that doesn't want to be in their gang.' (Jan)*

> *'I'm sure I haven't been as "yummy mummy" as I could have been with the kids. If I've been asked out by the mums: "I'm sorry, I've got work to do." (June)*

The women respondents tried to be part of the mums group by playing down the fact that they were doctoral students or avoiding talk about the PhD at all. They did this in a bid to

reflect the in-group characteristics and be accepted as part of the group. In identifying with the mums group, whilst denying their membership to the student group, the women were attempting to enhance their standing within the group, reinforcing their membership and positive distinctiveness (Huddy 2001).

> *'People think "Oh, you're clever because you're doing the PhD." And that's the funny one, because I think, "Well, I'm the same person as before''. The way they interact with you is like "Well, you're better than me now. You're cleverer than me…" It happened in the playground last week and I find that a bit hard, the "ooh, you're doing a doctorate…" (Helen)*

> *'I'll forever always be Abi's mum even though I think I'm many other things. All those things I was before. You know, the friend, the…all of the interests that I've got. I have less time for them now, but I still have them…I'm not just Abi's mum, you know? But I do think that people, when they hear you're a mum, if they don't know you or hadn't known you previously, there's an immediate kind of assumption of knowing what you are and who you are.' (Lynette)*

> *'I think people naturally just presume that once you've had a child you're not going to either put the effort in or have the time, or have the motivation and the drive to do whatever you're doing. Whether it's doing a PhD or it's, you know, in a research job, I think there's that kind of perception that your brain has just left the building.' (Nikki)*

Some of the women spoke of playing down the fact that they were enrolled on a doctoral programme, essentially depersonalizing their academic identities to ensure alignment with their in-groups. This is an issue highlighted by Lynch (2008) who discusses the pressure placed on women to not only be excellent students but to be excellent mothers in a role she refers to as 'intensive mothering'. This pressure leads to women alternating between 'maternal invisibility' and 'academic invisibility' whereby they would downplay one then the other in an attempt to manage expectations around the roles. This therefore left the

women as peripheral participants in all groups, thus denying them the opportunity for mutual engagement with other members.

> *'I think one of the things I've learnt is in doing a PhD, I tend to play it down quite a lot because I think people make a judgment. It's interesting, because even people I've known for a long time, like friend's husbands, they tend to see it as you think you're better and you're brighter. So it's almost the equivalent of a challenge sometimes, and you can see them…" Well, what are you doing it on then? What does that mean?" You're an expert in one thing, you know…you're not Brain of Britain. People have this perception of you. So I definitely play it down. I don't tend to say I'm doing a PhD.' (Kate)*

The women in this study felt that their personal identity was not consistent with the social identity displayed by some of the other social categories they belonged to, namely the mums group, friends group and work colleagues group. They deliberately avoided enhancing their personal identity which involved discussions around their progress with the PhD, instead focusing on what was expected in terms of group norms. This process of de-individuation led to their individual self-perception becoming depersonalized (Turner *et al.* 1994) and the women being defined as part of a group rather than an individual person, which is what their PhD study would have highlighted them as (Brewer & Gardner 1996).

> *'I'll knock down doing a PhD all the time when I'm with my friends, it drives my partner nuts. I think because I get quite embarrassed about it. I don't want people to think I think I'm cleverer than them or something, so I tend to try to bury it away a little bit, and we don't tend to talk about it very much. It's my thing that sits along, you know, every minute of existence, but other people tend to forget that I'm still doing it because I tend to bury it away a little bit or knock it if somebody asks me.' (Cath)*

'I have to be careful what I say to certain people because they think I'm a man-hater or I'm on my soap-box or I know too much. So yes, I have to be careful what I say sometimes. Sometimes I hide the fact that I'm doing a PhD.' (Rachel)

In doing a PhD, the women all felt they were challenging themselves and establishing a sense of identity beyond the mum in-group but due to their role as mother and the responsibilities associated with this role, they didn't reflect the associated stereotypes of the student in-group and as a result could not identify with the student in-group and student identity, all 35 women said they did not see themselves as a student in what they described as the 'typical' traits. This led to the women feeling a lack of connection with the student in-group, they could not identify with the role of student as their mother role was seen by them as having to take priority. Thus their experience of participation in the student community of practice was peripheral, leading to a marginality of experience within the student in-group (Wenger 2008).

'I find it hard to still be" Mum", but then be a student, be these other things as well. Because that's what takes the priority, it always will.' (Laura)

6.4.6 In-group - Students

'Roles provide structure, organization and meaning to selves and to situations, it is the set of expectations linked to a social position' (Burke & Stets 2009:13). The women all established certain criteria linked to the social positions they held and discussed how they fell short of fulfilling the criteria within these roles.

> *'I find the student is on the back-burner, that is always the one thing to miss out really. I find it is the study that's pushed out. And yet I identify myself most as a researcher, as a thinker, as more of an intellectual, so there is a conflict of identity there.' (Eileen)*

According to Burke & Stets (2009:116) identity verification is key to maintaining consistency with the meanings that define social roles. However, if individuals do not obtain verification for the identities they claim, they will become less satisfied with their roles and may withdraw from an interaction.

> *'I think sometimes I got to the stage where I was so aware that I was so different that it was better for me not to engage at all in it.' (Jan)*

> *'I'm not in the mould of the PhD student, like they seem to want me to be.' (Therese)*

> *'I'm not having a student experience. I think that's part of the physical difficulty of being so far away from the university. Because they do have lots of things on: They have social activities on, they've got a room you can go into sit and work and meet other people, but it's just impossible for me.' (Grace)*

The communities of practice framework consider the practice of shared resources and perspectives as key to the development of a community of practice, however the women remained peripheral members or non-members during their PhD due to the rigid

infrastructure of the institution that failed to adopt a flexible approach to its part-time female members. 'The lack of assistance for part-time students can be understood as a lack of institutional interest in supporting part-time students' scholarly activities' (Teeuwsen *et al.* 2014:692). Potential members of the communities of practice who work from home rather than on campus may feel 'invisible, forgotten or disparaged as not serious participants by other members of the community of practice because of their spatial location' (Jewson 2007:164). This can have a negative impact on the overall experience of the women.

The doctoral student and mother identity are not readily blended and as a result there is tension between the two roles (Lynch 2008). This tension of 'dual lives' (Brown & Watson 2010) becomes problematic due to the expectations placed on doctoral students to demonstrate the 'student role' characteristics. These characteristics were alluded to by the women in the interviews and included: Getting work completed on time, knowing other students to discuss work with, advancing in timely manner through the process, impressing their supervisor, being young with no familial commitments, having no time restraints, full time employment or work restrictions.

> *'For me, it was just getting the PhD done rather than all those lovely extra things you can do about immersing yourself in research, going to these meetings and listening to people talk, writing papers, presenting at student conferences…They're all great things and I think they're all positive things that should happen to a PhD student, but, as a mum, I couldn't do them. So perhaps that's why I didn't think of myself as a student, because I couldn't do all the student things. All you can see is the end, and you've got to aim for it without any of these extra things. And therefore, maybe a PhD experience isn't as positive and as fulfilling as maybe other people could have. So I think that could be a big problem for mums doing PhDs.' (Sara)*

Watts (2008) describes part-time students as having a 'fractured student identity' due to having multiple responsibilities and shifting roles.

'We get e-mails all the time, "This conference, that conference, blah, blah, blah"… it was in London on a Wednesday afternoon! That's not going to happen for me, I've got kids. I can't do that.' (Victoria)

'When I'm here as a student it's difficult because I'm still breastfeeding, so that's hard.'(Sokieta)

Therefore the women had to 'negotiate the meanings placed on their more permanent social identities' due to the studying and attempts to adopt a student role (Adams 1996:216), yet because of the pressure to maintain their standards as good mothers, the student identity was not something easily adopted by the women.

6.4.7 In-group – Colleagues, Family & Friends

The women spoke about the effects studying for a PhD had on their relationships with colleagues, families and friends. They talked in terms of how life used to be and what aspects of their relationships changed due to becoming students. The in-group characteristics of 'good' wife/sister/daughter/friend/colleague all focused on the core aspect of being available. Time to listen, being mentally 'present', visiting people, keeping in touch and attending social gatherings, attending meetings, being a team player were all mentioned as key in-group characteristics.

'There's an aspect of guilt. Friends, when they get in touch and say, "Can you come down this weekend?" I have to say, "I'm sorry, I can't, I just can't." (Moyra)

The women also listed characteristics that focused on domestic jobs that should be completed in the 'good wife' role such as cooking from scratch, food shopping, keeping on top of the ironing and having the dinner ready on time. These tasks were listed as what

the ‘ideal’ woman would be doing but the women all discussed the impossibility of maintaining a ‘perfect’ domestic scenario as their priorities of children, work and PhD left little time for maintaining a ‘good wife’ image.

> *‘We’re sold this sort of Superwoman ideal, aren’t we? And I just in no way live up to that. I think I’m a good mum. I’m a very loving mum; I’m a very affectionate mum. Very encouraging and very supportive… But I’m by no means a good sort of house keeper, as it were. But what I’m thinking to myself is, “Why should I be? My husband’s not!”. (Therese)*

When discussing their experiences of part-time PhD study, the women talked openly about their feelings of isolation within the academic environment, and the lack of community and support from the institution. For many areas of life, support comes from those closest to us, family and friends, we have informal communities of practice that support us in our learning and development. However, due to the lack of understanding of what a PhD actually is and what it entails, combined with the length of time it can take to complete a part-time PhD, those people who would usually engage with and support the women, were distant from the process. Support when it was given, was on a more superficial level, enquiring how it was going or if they had finished, as most people in the women’s lives had no comprehension of the complexities and challenges the women faced as they tried to combine life and motherhood with part-time PhD study. This resulted in the women never feeling they progressed through the community of practice, always remaining within perpetual peripherality (Wenger 2008).

> *‘People ask me, and they take a bit of an interest, they say, “How are you getting on with it?”, and I sort of roll my eyes, and they say, “Oh God. Have you not finished it yet?” Because I don’t think they really know what it involves. It’s a bit of a joke, “Oh, are you still doing that?” (Emma)*

> *‘Friends…I don’t think they understand what I’m doing to be honest. So I don’t particularly talk about it.*

The lack of understanding sometimes led people to perceive the PhD as something to threaten the status quo. It brought out insecurities in people as they addressed the PhD through the lens of their own limited comprehension of the doctoral process.

> *'I got accused of showing off because I had my bag from a conference on the other day and one of my closest friends said, "Oh, what are you doing with that, showing off?", And I said, "It's just a really good practical bag that I can fit things in!". (Eileen)*

The women also identified how work colleagues were unhappy at the prospect of them studying for a PhD. There was a suggestion of jealously of personal developments and resentment at time taken out of the working week to attend conferences or meet supervisors.

> *'Me and a colleague both started PhDs at around the same time. I always deemed that to be quite a supportive relationship, however, that has turned extremely sour recently, and it's become quite unpleasant and I've become very guarded about how my PhD progresses.' (Rachel)*

When the women's employment was outside of academia, the issues around their student identity were concentrated around them not matching the in-group characteristics of their work colleagues. The women didn't socialize outside of work due to childcare issues, they didn't engage with much popular culture due to the time constraints of having to study in addition to working and being a mum and as a result there was a lack of connection or common ground with the people they worked alongside. This 'difference' caused a distance between them and the women felt on the periphery of the work place community of practice. This lack of connection and peripheral positioning did not enhance the women's work prospects or motivation. The characteristics of wanting to study and gain knowledge about something alien to their co-workers resulted in them not demonstrating

the in-group characteristics of the work community of practice and thus left them excluded.

> *'Because I don't just go home and watch Coronation Street or talk about diets, it's this kind of…… It is something that can be seen as threatening, particularly if it's job prospects.' (Eileen)*

> *'You don't feel like you're interacting with people in the same way that you would because you're focused on your work and then everybody else is going out for a drink but you think, "No, I've got to get this done, and then I've got to get back and see her before she goes to bed.'' (Stephanie)*

The women expressed an unwillingness to take on extra duties due to the workload of the PhD but they felt this put them out of favour with colleagues. The workplace community can foster feelings of resentment towards those who are seen as 'not pulling their weight'. Despite the women's professionalism, the perception of them as trying to further educate themselves caused feelings of insecurity and jealously in work colleagues and the women described situations of one-upmanship, sabotage and bullying as a result. This was incredibly distressing for the women who felt they already had to work harder than male colleagues to prove themselves competent in the role. An example of this was provided by Kate, who echoes the position of Gouthro (2002) who states that women are still marginalized and devalued within academia:

> *'I find that I have to work harder to be able to prove myself. It's almost…for example, a new lecturer sometime back…another person was taken on at the same time as me and because he was male the assumption was that he would be able to do it because he was male, and that I wouldn't because I was female. And yet, privately, he wouldn't publicly admit it, but privately this person admitted that I would run rings around him. But I almost have to prove myself much more, in that the judgment is, "Oh, they can do it because they're a man, but I can't because I'm a woman." (Kate)*

Leadership in academia is predominantly male despite the high number of females in adult education programs (Burstow 1994). For more women to feel included and acknowledged as competent in their roles, this gender imbalance has to be addressed. Patricia also works in higher education and discusses the apparent and blatant assumptions about women in academia, how people presume certain in-group characteristics that women predominantly adopt administrative positions and do not hold positions of authority.

> *'Where I work now, I've never worked in such a sexist place in all my life. If you're a woman they ask you what time the coffee is, where the meeting room is…Just because you're a woman. You could be holding a briefcase, you know, and if you're a woman and walking through reception, they'll stop and ask you.' (Patricia)*

The lack of support for mothers in academia is well documented (Gouthro *et al.* 2006; Svanberg *et al.* 2006; Wolf-Wendell & Ward 2006; Wall 2008) and can result in women feeling they do not reflect the in-group characteristics of academic staff and are therefore less inclined to pursue a career path within an academic setting (Crabb & Ekberg 2013). The challenge for mothers studying for a part-time PhD therefore, is the 'reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries' (Wenger 2008:158) as each community of practice currently dictates a different set of characteristics that creates an overly complex self-image. In accepting there may be tensions between multi-membership of communities of practice, it could be argued that although we behave differently depending on the in-group characteristics, we maintain a core identity that influences our behaviour across all communities of practice. Thus the women may feel less peripheral in the student community of practice as they have skills and knowledge from existing roles that can contribute to the joint enterprise (Tummons 2012). The use of Self-Categorization Theory enables the different roles the women adopt to be identified, along with existing role characteristics and shifts in identity taking place during the women's experience of part-time PhD study. The findings in this section demonstrate the impact studying had on the women's sense of who they were and who they wanted to be.

6.5 Learning as Experience: Feelings, Beliefs and Impressions

'It is time for the voice of the mother to be heard in education' (Noddings 1984).

6.5.1 Introduction

> *'I just feel as if I'm doing a bad job at everything, you know? I don't feel I could do a good job with any of them because I'm spreading myself so thinly for everything.' (Laura)*

Emotion is perceived as a subjective word, it can suggest weakness and is usually aligned with female identity. Yet to truly understand an individual's experience, to communicate one's feelings about a particular issue, to explain in detail one's perspective about the PhD process, the challenges, the institutional approach, this level of inquiry requires the use of emotion and is necessary for a depth of understanding into the issues concerned within this study. This section will consider the feelings, beliefs and impressions of the respondent women in this study, considering key issues surrounding what the women expressed as the conflict in their lives. The respondents often described their many responsibilities as 'spinning plates' (Cronshaw 2016), having contradictory priorities that drew them in many different directions and produced conflicting emotions about the PhD and its place in their lives. The key role that provoked the most conflict is that of mother. The status of motherhood in society is brought into question by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) who consider the role of motherhood in an employment context. They identify that people's perceptions of competence are lower and they do not recognize mothers as being suitable for positions of authority which can affect women's career advancement. Historically it has usually been women who have taken time out of employment to care for newborn children, women were therefore considered less reliable in terms of opportunities for promotion and advancement (Ledwith & Manfredi 2000; Mayer & Tikka 2008) as they may be away from the workplace for nine months, many then requesting a reduction in hours to maintain some element of childcare after returning to work. Men

were not afforded this opportunity until April 2015, it was only from this date that men have been allowed equal paternity leave. This reliance on women to sacrifice potential career progression supports the 'maternal wall' (Crosby *et al.* 2004) a social, economic and cultural barrier experienced by women with dependent children. This maternal wall is a term relevant to the women in this study as they all discuss the difficulties of the PhD in terms of reconciliation of conflicting 'mothering' responsibilities. The resultant assertion is that it is their role as mother that impedes advancement in their PhD. The juggling of the mother role and the responsibilities linked to that role in relation to undertaking a PhD leads to feelings of guilt, anxiety, exhaustion and self-doubt. These issues will be further explored in this chapter of the study.

6.5.2 Guilt

'Contemporary life is time pressured and economically precarious' (Miller 2011:146). With an increasing focus on material gain, it has become harder for families to live on one wage alone, therefore requiring both parents to seek employment (Featherstone 2009). There then ensues a balancing act of work and family time with each placing high demands on the focus and energy of the people involved leading to 'the intensification of all economic activities, spanning work and consumption, and the erosion of the boundaries between work, non-work and leisure' (Webb 2006:195).

The constraints of time and space to study are clear when looking at the lives of the women with children in this study, however what has become apparent in the course of this research are the moral constraints affecting the women. Their feelings of guilt around conflict between their mothering responsibilities and study time have been identified by the respondent women involved in this research. Women experience conflict around day-to-day responsibilities as they attempt to adhere to what Bepko and Krestan (1990) refer to as society's hidden 'Code of Goodness'. As reflected in the narratives of the women in this study, a familiar feeling is that they have not done anything well-enough and as a result, they never had what Bepko and Krestan (1990:5) describe as the 'luxury of self-

satisfaction'. Instead, the women felt self-doubt, guilt and greater conflict in their lives, all common feelings associated with the 'Code of Goodness'. The women in this study were striving to feel good rather than to be good, they wanted to feel competent and autonomous in their achievements but experienced conflict due to the pressure to fulfill their 'obligations' as mothers.

The role of the 'ideal' mother is a socially constructed one that reinforces the gendered division of labour whereby women do not allow paid work to take precedence over mothering (Phoenix *et al.* 1991). This common societal assumption that a woman's main focus in life should always be her children leads to feelings of guilt when, as a mother, one deviates from this expectation. This is reflected by Rich (1986:52) who suggests that 'a mother's very character, her status as a woman, are in question if she has 'failed' her children'. Undertaking paid employment can be reconciled in one's own mind as a contribution to the family budget and therefore part of the 'taking care' of one's children. The PhD however, has no immediate or direct positive consequences for the family. It is seen by some of the women as a selfish task that takes them away from the family. Feelings of guilt often arise when there is a lack of perceived control over the conflicting demands placed on women juggling differing roles within their lives (Elvin-Nowark 1999). This was apparent when listening to the respondents' feelings about how often they are denied spending time with their children due to having to work on their PhD.

> *'I feel guilty about me having to work when they're about. I feel frustrated that I can't give them enough time, you know, and so I do try to not do it when they're about as much as I can.' (Heather)*

The phenomenon of guilt is given significance by the lived experiences of the women in this study, they all experienced feelings of guilt around their priorities, their relationships and what they felt they should be doing to ensure they adhered to the societal expectations of motherhood today. The women feel a responsibility for the care of their family and the guilt manifests itself around this sense of responsibility (Elvin-Nowak 1999).

'I do feel I sacrifice things with the children and I feel guilty. Because when they were little I had more time to do things with them and I used to do lots and lots of stuff with the children. And now, you know, it's more difficult, I always feel guilty.' (Mary Ann)

The guilt the women in this study felt is something described by Elvin-Nowak (1999) as 'everyday guilt'. This everyday guilt is a fairly constant feeling that can fluctuate depending on the context and interactions of the women with their children.

'I was putting my daughter into bed, and she said, "Why are you so happy?" I said, "Oh, I don't know. What do you mean?" And she said, "Well normally you're sitting at that computer doing work, work, work and you're in a big grump." (Laura)

Time was a key factor when the women talked about their feelings of guilt, phrases such as 'managing time' and 'taking time' were frequently used to describe the women's perceptions of the impact of the PhD.

'I think probably just the difficulties of managing my time and then managing my guilt around managing my time.'(Lynette)

'I feel as if I'm taking time that I could be with the children.' (Cecillia)

'The last few months have been brutal and I've had a lot of time out from my kids, which I begrudge. Really begrudge, because they're my priority and work is way down the list, the PhD is way down the list. But it's a balancing act and I guess you have to forgive yourself that you're not as perfect as you thought you were.' (June)

Another term frequently used by the women is 'should'. The word 'should' reinforces the belief that they could be doing more to fulfill the ideal mother role. This sense of

obligation extends further, incorporating all aspects of the women's lives, they strive to be a good wife, friend, daughter, sister and colleague and it is this 'perfect' vision of themselves that puts incredible strain on the women as they juggle not only their multiple roles but the guilt to which the juggling gives rise. 'Society creates enabling potentials and boundaries that shape the individuals who make up our social world, this instigates a complex negotiation between the person and society' (Josselson 1996:193).

> *'It's the guilt I suppose. The guilt that I'm not doing what I should be doing; it hangs over you all the time.' (Grace)*

> *'There's been a lot of guilt at times. I think that's probably the biggest feeling I've had over the course of it. Often when I've been doing things, thinking, "Should I actually be doing this?" You know, "Shouldn't I be spending more time with the children? Could I be a better mother if my head wasn't full of…?" It's not the actual physical time, it's almost, you know, space for remembering things.' (Helen)*

According to Elvin-Nowak (1999) a guilt situation can occur around who the women are and who they want to be. In this study, the women discussed the ideal mother role and listed attributes such as cooking from scratch, always having time for their children and having a tidy home. The feeling of 'falling short' made the women feel bad as the PhD study took away time they could have been spending with their family. For many women, leisure time is considered as time for others, an extension of the selfless mother role, rather than time for themselves (Moss 2006). As part of the selfless role of mother, women often de-self, the process of sacrificing their own wants and beliefs for others (Ohannessian *et al.* 1995). This is echoed by Kember (1999:116) 'the difficulty and degree of sacrifice and adaptation should not be underestimated'.

> *'And there's times where I feel guilty like I've pushed the children away and said, "Sorry, I can't…" (Kate)*

'My daughter started Year seven last year and was having a really hard time, and I didn't know, she didn't tell me. I should have guessed something because her skin absolutely erupted, it was really, really bad, which I was going to put down to teenage hormones, but she was actually having a terrible time settling into secondary school for the first time, and she didn't tell me because she didn't want to add to my work.' (Rachel)

This ideal mother role is described by Rotkirch *et al.* (2009) as the 'motherhood myth'. This motherhood myth 'presents an idealized view of mothers as exclusive caretakers who are universally present, nurturing and kind, not absent or selfish' (Rotkirch *et al.* 2009:102) and it instigates feelings of not quite meeting the standards expected by society. This was a common feeling expressed by many of the women in this study. They felt they existed in a perpetual state of feeling guilty about something or someone.

'I think feeling as though you're always letting someone or something down.' (Laura)

According to Gilligan, a woman's identity is defined by her relationships, she is 'judged by a standard of responsibility and care' (1992:126). This reflects the women's rationale for feeling guilty about the effects of the time spent on the PhD versus time spent with their family.

'So far I have refused to put my daughter in a nursery as I wanted her cared for one-to-one in the home, but I am being forced to look at nurseries now. I feel very conflicted about this.' (Abby)

The guilt felt by most of the women in this study is linked to what Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001:415) describe as a common perception among mothers that 'accessibility, sensitivity and engagement from the mother constitute a future guarantee for the child's well-being'. The women felt they were in some way potentially damaging their children or affecting their future well-being by not being constantly present and

available due to the demands of the PhD. The women did not want to modify the demands placed on them as mothers, when they did, they felt guilty for not adhering to the dominant 'good mother' ideology that assigns women to the family domain.

> *'I feel like I've farmed her out a bit recently, and it has had a massive impact on her. She stopped eating for about three weeks and it has been…and then I feel bad, I feel like I should just stop it all until she's older.' (Victoria)*

> *'I missed out on a lot of growing up because they would go off for days and I would just work.' (Naomi)*

Rich (1977) identifies motherhood as two entities, motherhood as experience is deemed positive and holds values of love and selflessness whereas motherhood as institution reflects the more negative aspects of isolation and hard work. It is actually the experience of motherhood that has impacted the women's feelings of guilt in this study. The selflessness of motherhood has led to feelings of guilt as they are doing something for themselves that sometimes takes them away, either physically or mentally, from their children. This reinforces feelings that they are not adhering to the role of good mother. They feel that in studying for a PhD they are not being selfless, indeed many of the women participating in this study felt that undertaking the PhD was a selfish act as it was something that was deemed to be just for them with no immediate benefit to others. 'Guilt occurs when women put responsibility for themselves and their own needs foremost' (Elvin-Nowak 1999:73).

> *'It feels like working on my PhD is more of a selfish use of my time.' (Therese)*

> *'You're choosing to use some of your precious time to do something solely for your own purposes. So it does feel quite selfish.' (Helen)*

> *'It's quite a selfish, greedy task, doing a PhD.' (Rachel)*

In viewing the PhD as selfish, the women then reconciled it as something that could not take priority as they, as mothers, have been conditioned to put their family's needs before their own. 'A concern for individual survival comes to be branded as selfish' (Gilligan 1992:126). This therefore affected how the women viewed involvement in the PhD community of practice, their participation was impeded by feelings of guilt and anxiety that prevented them channeling the meaning into a positive experience.

> *'PhD probably comes down at the bottom. Partly I think that's because I'm very much reconciled to this is something that's very much on the side for me, it's very much a personal interest thing. And therefore, it can't take priority.'(Moyra)*

This social obligation to fulfill the demands of being a good mother (Guendouzi 2006) places a burden on the women that results in their own needs and desires being pushed down the list of priorities. Whilst discussing the guilt felt when having to work on the PhD instead of participating in family activities, Grace highlighted that the conversation would be very different if it was a man in the same situation, she suggested that the term 'selfish' is not something that would be associated with a father.

> *'You give, give, give as a mother and as a partner, and sometimes you think, "no one has actually given me anything back." And maybe you just lose the knack of noticing when you need to be selfish. And there has to be a point where you're demonstrating to your family "actually, this is for me. This is something I want for me'' my kids need to see that a mother can do that as well. I don't think we would question that of a man.' (Grace)*

> 'Normative expectations of men as parents do not usually entail the range or intensity of emotional and physical labour expected of women/mothers. Some men do undertake 'motherwork' but it is usually perceived as contradictory and awkwardly aligned with their status as 'men'' (O'Reilly, Porter & Short 2005:218).

There was a split in the women's perspectives on the effect of the PhD on their family. Whilst they all acknowledged the difficulties in juggling family commitments with studying, some referred to it as a selfish task whilst some reconciled the studying as having a positive outcome for the family. This reflects the thinking of Field Belenky *et al.* (1997) who suggest that women can feel comfortable advancing themselves if it is clear that self advancement is also a means of helping others. Having a positive influence on their children's view of education, acting as a role model and reinforcing the benefits of education for career progression are considered by the women as positive outcomes for their families.

> *'At least they'll understand that if you want to get ahead you've got to work, you know, you've got to learn.' (Laura)*

> *'I quite like the idea that I'm acting as a good female role model for her. I suppose it's just that idea that, you know, that she can do anything.' (Lynette)*

> *'I hope I can be a role model for my son as well, because he often talks about what he wants to do at university.' (Joanne)*

> *'As a parent, to have children watch you do your studying, it's so powerful.' (Cath)*

Wenger (2008) highlights the importance of learning as experience, as our participation in communities of practice provide meaning for the world around us. If we are denied that experience or feel the meaning is stifled due to external pressures and expectations, then the true experience of learning is lost. The women in this study expressed their desires to learn, to experience new things in the hope it would give meaning to their own worlds, enhancing their perceptions of themselves and providing them with the confidence to use their new found knowledge for both self-enhancement and the benefit of others. Wenger (2008) identifies there can be difficulties in participation where learning is prevented or at least impeded in some way, which has been the experience of the women in this study. As mothers, their role, which society dictates should be all-encompassing (Lemkau &

Landau 1986; Rotkirch *et al.* 2009), often restricted their access to the PhD community of practice. Their feelings of worry and guilt at putting the PhD before any other commitments, the concerns about the impact of studying on their children's well-being and the balancing between mothering priorities and the PhD all added to the distance they felt from the community of practice. Thus they were, at best, peripheral participants only partially aligned with the community of practice, who could not fully explore imagined possibilities due to their lack of full engagement (Tummons 2012).

6.5.3 Implications: Motherhood v's PhD

> *'Here comes a cyclone, and by the way, it's called a PhD'. (June)*

Despite most of the women in this study being in paid employment, they were still taking on the role of primary carer for their children. The responsibility for the 'second shift' of domestic labour has been described as 'double duty' (Hochschild 1989) which can cause difficulties juggling the workload between work and home (Mederer 1993). According to Kiger *et al.* (1996) the second shift of domestic labour encompasses not only household tasks, but childcare and the managing of relationships within the private sphere. It is within this context of managing paid and unpaid work inside and outside the home that the women in this study attempt to forge space and time for the PhD.

> *'I do a lot of things but I don't excel at any of them, because I'm only giving a part of my attention. If I had more time, I could do much better. I feel that way about the PhD.' (Emma)*

The women in this study all felt they had a distinct lack of time to do anything 'properly', they described trying to 'squeeze' PhD study into an already busy lifestyle but due to the complexities of working and managing a family, the PhD was never deemed important enough to take priority. This sense of being time poor is accentuated by societal pressure

to adhere to the perfect mother stereotype, a role that expects women to prioritize everyone over themselves. This led to the PhD, which was seen by the women as something for themselves and therefore an almost selfish activity, as being at the bottom of a long list of tasks.

Time, or lack of, is one of the key words used by every woman participating in this study however, lack of time is not something attributed exclusively to having children. Many part-time students struggle identifying blocks of time they can use for study due to work commitments, looking after elderly relatives or not living near the institution at which they are registered. There is also the problem faced by those who work of switching mentally from a work task to the PhD. The demands of doctoral study require focus and concentration, something people struggle to adapt to after completing a day in work. Whilst there is the opportunity to study at weekends, this can lead to resentment as the PhD is seen to be 'encroaching' on what is considered 'down time' (Gatrell 2006; Philips & Pugh 1998). In addition to the challenges faced by part-time students, women with children have additional demands placed on them and their time. Rudd (1985) identifies the divide between men and women when undertaking postgraduate study, he lists a variety of scenarios such as women being called to collect an unwell child from school and problems in pregnancy to demonstrate the familial responsibilities that prevent women having long periods of study. 'Women carry motherhood around with them, while men are more adept at experiencing their roles sequentially' (Phoenix *et al.* 1991:200).

> *'When you've got lots of big things going on in life and you have to somehow keep your finger on the pulse for each section. You can't drop one. You can't say, "Sorry, I'm not going to be a mum this week. I'm not going to sort your problems at school, because, actually, I've got a PhD to do." You can't do that.' (June)*

'Women are defined by society, primarily as wives and mothers and their activities in the home involve continuous connection to and concern about children.' (Chodorow 1978:178). Therefore, the women's experience of part-time PhD study cannot be separated from their mother role, the two, despite the tensions, must exist together.

'There have been times when I've had to cancel things here and say, "Look, I need to be a mum now. I can't come here." And I hate the fact that I feel like I'm letting people down. I feel like I've got something to prove. So just because I'm a mum doesn't mean I can't do this PhD. And don't think I can't, because I can. So when I go, "I can't come in today because my child's ill", I feel like there's people going, "Oh, well…." (Victoria)

Institutions currently fail to account for the lack of time and energy mothers have (Emmons Allison 2007) and should consider ways to improve the PhD experience for mothers. This is reflected in a study by Fothergill and Feltey (2003) who identified that three quarters of the women in their research felt that they were less productive due to having children.

'Oh, I've no doubt if I hadn't become a mum that it would be done by now.' (Eileen)

'My issue has not been the motivation, it's not been the commitment, it's not been the dedication towards the subject, it's been the pure time, and I think if you didn't have the children, you'd be able to put everything down and just carry on with it.' (Jess)

When describing their experiences, the women in this study discussed at length the difficulties managing the conflicting roles and responsibilities that come from studying whilst raising children, they often used the term 'juggling' (Crosby 1991) to describe the numerous tasks that competed for their time.

'It's this fitting in, I'd be grabbing a lunch hour here or trying to fit in something after work when you're really tired and if you have to go home and make the dinner, and the kids have got their homework and you try to fit in the homework,

try to fit in your husband, have a conversation longer than five minutes that isn't about the kids, and it's just really hard.' (Patricia)

'Woman's proper place in education is one of equality – but that can only be achieved when man's place in the house becomes one of equality too. Women's place in education will be nearer when Mothercare is renamed Parentcare' (Delamont, 1990:14).

Although women in employment is commonplace in society today, they still usually remain the primary carer, so rather than feeling empowered to be working, the fact that they are employed has an overloading effect (Rueschemeyer 1981). This overloading is what many of the women refer to when considering the implication of doing a PhD. They strive to 'just keep everything going' (Millar 2009) because for many of the women in this study, the day-to-day juggling of multiple roles and responsibilities was stressful and demanding and they talked about it needing 'just one thing to go wrong' such as a sick child to throw everything off kilter.

'I might intend to write 500 words every night this week and get nothing written because I've got a child throwing up the whole time.'(Joan)

'I'll be, you know, watching SpongeBob Square Pants for the fifteenth time and then kind of mulling over what I'm doing and come up with something and think, "Oh!" And I just want to get straight on the computer and look it up and do some work on it, and then, if I had the chance, I could probably do five hours work then, I'm in the zone. But then it's tea time. I have to make fish fingers and stuff. And then it goes.' (Victoria)

The overloading can lead to students feeling overwhelmed with the enormity of the task, many of the women in this study questioned at various points in the process, the validity of them continuing to manage the numerous roles and responsibilities that came with working, being a mum and studying for a PhD. 'The physical and psychic weight of

responsibility on the woman with children is by far the heaviest of social burdens' (Rich 1977:52).

> *'I think there's times where I just feel physically worn down with it, I can't breathe and I'm like…there's times you physically feel the pressure so much that you can't breathe.' (Eileen)*

Thompson (1996) describes this time-pressed lifestyle as 'emotionally demanding' as women experience feelings of frustration, guilt and being overwhelmed.

> *'Mental health, mental stability. There's some days you're clinging on by your finger nails. Because it's just immense carrying the full work load and all the commitments that come with our job, then doing a PhD, then organising a family.' (June)*

Benn (1996:30) describes the situation of a woman working whilst continuing her role as mother as a 'sheer force of collision between private and public worlds'. This use of the word collision suggests that the two aspects of a woman's life do not naturally work in harmony, instead there is a source of friction which in the case of the respondents in this study, is the PhD. She highlights how women are 'always at a disadvantage, one hand tied behind their back' as they manage the private domain as mother alongside the public roles of student and worker. The women tried to create boundaries around their home life to prevent the PhD impacting on the private sphere. However, the amount and intensity of work required for doctoral study meant these boundaries just added to the difficulties in switching between their various domains and the women were often stuck between the two.

The implications of studying for a PhD were far reaching and touched many aspects of the women's lives. The women discussed the things they gave up or missed as a result of them doing the PhD. They also provided very honest accounts of personal sacrifices that had repercussions beyond the initial study period. Abby, having had fertility treatment

before the birth of her first child, was concerned about the risks of waiting too long before beginning the treatment again, yet delayed the process due to the PhD.

> *'I suppose on the personal side the main sacrifice has been delaying trying for another baby. I am due to complete my PhD in October and I know that if I have another baby that will not be possible. I am therefore delaying trying until the PhD is complete, despite the time feeling right for my family to expand. This is potentially problematic as I will be 38 and could be running out of time.' (Abby)*

Abby's situation demonstrates the emotional turmoil caused by the conflicting demands of studying for a part-time PhD. Many of the women highlighted issues that affected them more because they had less time to prepare and deal with them, examples such as children's problems in school, family illness and strained marital relationships were discussed by the women.

> *'As a family, we sacrificed a lot. So it's doing things with your family, I think. And much more, your husband, actually. Your children…Children, I think, you try to protect, but you don't protect your partner. They have to tolerate it, I think.' (Sara)*

> *'The PhD has taken away some of the special bits of being a mum.' (Sara)*

Due to the time required to undertake a part-time PhD, the women found that there were repercussions not only in terms of family time but also with regards to friendships.

> *'Friends went by the by I must admit, it can be quite difficult to fit everything in and social life's the thing that goes. It has to be. You can't do everything.' (Cecillia)*

> *I haven't seen…I've got a few really good friends who have been wonderful, but a lot of friends I haven't seen for a long time.' (June)*

You have to put effort in to maintain anything other than being a mum, I suppose. And things have to be dropped by the wayside. I made a decision that I want to do this PhD, so that means I no longer do any of my other hobbies.' (Lynette)

Undertaking a PhD is not something to be taken lightly, it takes time, determination, tenacity, mental and emotional strength. The pressures of studying for a doctorate are complex and can affect students in many ways. When, as a student, you not only have the PhD, but work issues to consider, the pressure and stress can increase. Adding the demanding role of mother into the equation can increase the pressure tenfold, as the PhD stresses are exacerbated by the day to day management of a family and the challenges of raising children.

June describes how, eight weeks before her viva, her father-in-law became critically ill, she was having to manage both her and her family's worry and grief whilst preparing for the viva and continuing to juggle her full-time job and family commitments.

'I came into work having cared for him all Christmas and said to my boss, "Either I take a week off sick or I work from home, because if I don't I'm either going to kill someone or kill myself." I said, "I have reached capacity.'' (June)

Many of the women in this study have felt during the process of studying for a PhD that things had just got too much to deal with and questioned their motivation to continue with the doctorate. They often felt overwhelmed at the enormity of the task, not the task of doing the PhD, but the task of doing the PhD part-time alongside sustaining employment and bringing up their children.

'Just lots of different things whizzing around in your head and all sorts of panic moments of "How the Hell am I going to do this?". (Cecilia)

'I've often doubted. I've often sat and thought, "What the Hell am I doing this for?" I'm putting myself through…well, Hell is the term I would use. It's a Hellish experience just trying to fit it in. It's always there, it's always sort of haunting me. Yeah, it's like a large spider. It's like a tarantula in the corner of the room just waiting for me. So yeah, really feeling like I'm going mad at times.' (Eileen)

According to Gordon *et al.* (2002) in their study on midlife transition, women in their midlife, aged 35 – 50 with children go through a period of re-balancing whereby they change their role performance and re-structure their priorities. This results in women spending more time with family, changing work strategies, re-instating personal interests and hobbies and devoting more time to personal relationships. The process of re-balancing led to increased feelings of satisfaction with their lives. This process of allowing oneself to re-structure the conflicting demands in life, allowing time to nurture close relationships and develop personal interests provides the opportunity to re-focus on what is deemed important rather than being distracted and distanced from family life by work commitments.

Whilst the study by Gordon *et al.* (2002) discusses its findings based on a relatively small sample size and is not representative of the overall population, the act of transition is something alluded to by the women participating in this study, as a goal on completion of the PhD, they talk about returning to 'normal' life and activities they gave up when embarking on the PhD.

'I do see this as a massive "I'm going to get this done and life can go back to normal, and the kids can have me back." I definitely see it like that, yeah: the kids will get mum back.' (Helen)

'After I passed the Viva, my daughter was in a school play, but it's the fact that I went along and enjoyed it without thinking, "I'm giving up a day to do my PhD." And you'll always go, you'll always enjoy it, but in the back of your mind all the

time it's, "Gosh, I've given up a day, I'm going to have to make up the time somewhere." (Sara)

This re-balancing is something denied to women in this study despite 27 out of the 35 being in the midlife age bracket of 35 – 50. The norms of midlife women transitioning to a more relaxed, family and self-oriented life are not enjoyed by the women as it is argued the PhD is preventing this transition. Many of the women discuss having to give up hobbies, sacrifice time spent with friends and manage guilt around a lack of focus on their children due to the PhD.

'It is worthwhile, but it's at a cost. And I don't think… I don't think that should be underplayed. It's a huge cost. I can see why so many marriages go off the rails. Because I lived in isolation, pretty much, I mean, every evening I worked, I was never sitting on the settee talking to my husband, ever. I've never been out, I've not been shopping for nearly three years, I haven't done much exercise, I haven't socialised, I haven't done anything really, I've just bunkered down. So it's a huge sacrifice. It's the ultimate, really.' (June)

'I sacrificed time and holidays. I mean, I was always around, but my son came and said, "Can I talk to you yet Mummy? They'd been trying to stay out of my way, because they realised it was important to me. And then you go, "What am I doing?" (Patricia)

The process of studying is keeping the women from moving forward to transition. It is only on completion do they embrace the 'transition' and begin to re-prioritize and re-claim their lives.

6.5.4 Lack of self-belief & confidence

In their work on the use of progress reports to manage doctoral candidates, Mewburn *et al.* (2014) found that women were more anxious and tended to worry and over-think the process which in-turn led them to feel less 'part of the academy' whereas the men were 'disengaged and even nonchalant'. This gender difference in attitude and confidence with the progress reporting reflects a wider issue around women and their doctoral experience, with many women in this study highlighting a lack of self-belief about their potential.

> *'I doubted I was competent or capable of doing it. So that's what I mean when I say I have to do things really, really well; it's about my self-confidence and self-esteem in things really.' (Kate)*

> *'My study side is very much quite lacking in self-confidence, definitely.' (Cath)*

The women in this study considered themselves as 'novices' in terms of the PhD (Lave & Wenger 1991). They lacked confidence in their knowledge and ability partly due to their exclusion from the institution and postgraduate research activities available and as a result it could be argued they remained as novices within the PhD community of practice. Encouraging connections between 'novices' and experts can support the process of movement from peripheral to full member (Tilley 2003) however this support in transition was lacking from the institutions the women studied at. This raises the issue of the women's isolation from the community of practice, as Bradley (2004) argues that when novices are sequestered, they are unable to learn from experienced members and therefore fail to become more involved, knowledgeable members of the community of practice. Thus it would seem the women's experience of being sequestered reinforced their position as novice and peripheral member of the community of practice and prevented them from identifying themselves as students. It is crucial to a members learning and knowledge acquisition that they interact and learn from other members (Brooks 2010; Harvey *et al* 2013), a situation denied to the women in this study as they were forced to rely on individual learning resources instead of the shared repertoire of the community of practice.

When considering the benefits to an individual who participates in a community of practice, Fontaine and Miller (2004) identified a number of positive criteria including a sense of belonging, personal reputation, personal productivity and enhanced skills and knowledge. These personal benefits would aid in building the confidence of the women in this study, providing them with reassurance about their doctorate, their approach and their knowledge. Instead, due to the isolation and lack of involvement in a community of practice, the women are filled with a lack of self-belief with no opportunities for social learning.

> *'Before this I really didn't think I was clever enough to do this…I actually think that was the damage I had from my own university, for my BA…I was made to feel quite stupid. I think I'm only the second person in the whole of the extended family to go to university.' (Joanne)*

Due to this lack of interaction and limited access to the shared repertoire of knowledge, many of the women in this study described feelings of doubt over their ability, they felt they were not intelligent enough or not capable of completing the PhD, this lack of self-belief reflects what Clance and Imes (1978) highlighted as the Imposter Phenomenon. This phenomenon refers to people who are competent yet secretly feel inadequate and fear being 'found out' as not capable. The women expressed a lack of confidence and self-belief in their academic abilities despite having successful careers and being accepted on to a doctoral programme, therefore being recognized as capable by the institution.

> *'I think maybe I partly didn't feel I was worthy of doing it. I think I felt that I wasn't intelligent enough, which I think is something I still feel.' (Denise)*

Mature students have less opportunities for socialization and therefore do not develop a sense of belonging at their institution which, according to Chapman (2016) is crucial to developing a student identity. In addition to the lack of interaction with the community of practice, the women had to deal with the burden of conflicting priorities. Much of women's socialization is centered around nurturing others so if they take on a career or

academic work they are expected to successfully manage home and childcare responsibilities at the same time. This expectation to do everything well, combined with a fear of failure can cause conflict and guilt about competence, enhancing imposter feelings. (Clance and O'Toole 1988)

> *'I didn't tell anyone I was doing a PhD until two and a half years in. I didn't have the confidence. So therefore, to save me from being…not ridiculed, but there was always that feeling…I mean, I know no one would, but there was always that little uneasiness about what they might say. So I found it more comfortable to prove myself before I said anything. So that's what I did. And even my own mum I didn't say anything to for ages.' (June)*

The women had to work through their fears and self-doubt yet with little connection to a community of practice and others going through the same process, the self-doubt often spiraled. In its simplest form, Imposter Phenomenon is grounded in a fear of failure, due to a lack of confidence in one's abilities (Kumar and Jagacinski 2006). The Imposter Phenomenon is said to be prevalent in women more than men, a study among Austrian doctoral students in 2012 found that female doctoral students suffered from imposter feelings and showed lower research self-efficacy than males. This caused a psychological barrier for the women, who felt they were lacking in the intellectual ability to complete the PhD (Jostl *et al.* 2012).

> *'I've had that self-doubt all the way through, until fairly recently thinking, "Oh, I can't do this." Don't know why I kept going thinking I couldn't do it, but I did keep going. It's only now when I'm near the end that I think I can. I can do this.' (Helen)*

> 'Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled everyone into thinking otherwise. Numerous achievements which one might expect to provide ample evidence of superior

intellectual functioning do not appear to affect the imposter belief" (Clance and Imes 1978:241).

'I think what held me back in the beginning was that I was a constant self-doubter, and I kept saying to my supervisor, "I've reached my limit now, haven't I? I reached the limit at master's level. I don't think I should be doing this." (Helen)

'When I'm studying I have absolutely no self-confidence whatsoever.' (Cath)

'I still do have some of those fears that I'm not academic enough, I'm not intelligent enough.' (Denise)

The women were striving to maintain a balance in their lives ensuring their multiple roles were played to an almost unattainable level of perfection. The pressure to perform combined with a reluctance to accept their successes led to feelings of anxiety around their competence in successfully completing the PhD. They worked harder than was necessary to achieve success that they then felt uncomfortable acknowledging as legitimate, demanding 'superwoman' attributes of themselves (Clance 1985:82).

'I came in lacking a lot of confidence as a woman, I think. Even now I always make sure that I do everything really, really well. I know that I maybe don't need to put the amount of effort I do in things, but for me it's work ethic. I never want to blag something, I want to absolutely know that I can do it.' (Kate)

In addition to the Imposter Phenomenon traits of being more introverted than extroverted, a need to look smart to others and a non-supportive family background, factors highlighted by Langford (1990) include a need to gain admiration and validation about their achievements from others. This does not reflect the thinking of the women in this study as they tend to avoid discussions about the PhD and their progress and focus on their own achievements in relation to the PhD as proof of self-worth rather than gaining recognition from external sources. Imposter Phenomenon is however, a concept relevant to the women

in this study due to the level of self-doubt and self-belief they have in relation to their work on the PhD. Imposter Phenomenon does not identify a prescribed set of criteria and is therefore used in this study as a way of attributing some meaning to the lack of confidence felt by the women.

It was only when the women in the study were nearing the end of their PhD or had submitted their thesis that they reflected on the process in terms of their own growth in confidence. They emphasized the feeling of being immersed in worry about the research, constantly doubting they could accomplish it, never allowing themselves to feel positive about what they were doing. They didn't have the self-belief until it was actually completed or near completion and they had external recognition from their supervisors or examiner that the work was of doctoral standard. This study has identified the power of feeling that completing a PhD can incite. On completion the women describe feeling 'powerful', 'confident' and 'happy again'.

> *'It has given me the right to say, "Do you know, you're a pretty smart dude, you know what you're talking about. Go for it." It's massively empowering.' (June)*

> *'I think it makes me feel stronger as a person.' (Lynn)*

> *'For the first time I might actually be quite proud of myself.' (Joanne)*

> *'I think I started the process thinking, "Oh, I'm not really bright enough and I can't do this", to now where I think, "Absolutely, I can do this and I'm capable of it…" (Kate)*

Patricia talked about how she 'disappeared' when she became a mum, losing her identity to that of the generic mum identity that allowed everyone to make assumptions about who she was and what she did. The PhD process, although quite harrowing for her at times, provided her with a vehicle for self-discovery, allowing the 'true' persona to reveal herself with a renewed confidence and a positive sense of self.

> *'It's given me confidence to be who I am. It's given me confidence in my own intelligence as well, learning to speak out and having my opinion heard again. It just woke me up inside completely, and I was really enthused about everything and I just went back to the way I was before.' (Patricia)*

These findings can provide mothers considering embarking on a part-time PhD with a real insight into the experiences of others currently going through the process. In exploring the women's feelings about the process of part-time PhD study, this research has identified an honesty from the women in acknowledging the internal struggles they have. In attempting to reconcile the mother and student role they are managing feelings of guilt at the amount of time required for the PhD whilst attempting to fulfil the role of 'good' mother (Guendouzi 2006), alongside a lack of confidence and self-belief that they are indeed capable of achieving a doctorate. The women also reflected on the implications of PhD study on their lives overall, openly acknowledging the difficulty of juggling an array of responsibilities on top of the requirements for a PhD. It is good therefore, to listen to the few women in this study who have actually completed their thesis and the positive impact that it has had for them. It is on hearing these experiences that other women going through the process may be given some hope that although tough and at times may feel like an impossible task, there are ways through it that have positive outcomes relating to their sense of self, their identity and their confidence.

6.6 Learning as Belonging: Student Experience

'There must be an understanding of the academic experiences of ordinary women in order to design education appropriate for women' (Palmieri 1979:541).

6.6.1 Introduction

There are varying approaches to the structure of a PhD programme. This section will highlight how the women feel they have been treated by the institutions, the systems that they feel work and the formats they feel should be changed. There is currently a base of literature dealing with the issues around the doctoral student experience and within these texts the challenges faced by female students are considered. White (2004) suggests that women face structural and attitudinal barriers created by a dominant masculine culture in H.E. These barriers, combined with the other obstacles highlighted in the literature such as having responsibility for childcare (Evans & Grant 2009; Jackson 2008; Leonard 2001) part-time study (McCulloch & Stokes 2008; Phillips & Pugh 1998) tension between domestic and academic demands (Carter *et al*. 2013) and being older than male counterparts when entering postgraduate study (Sax 2008) provide a daunting outlook for any women considering embarking on a research degree. 'Women's varying commitments to paid work, education, and responsibilities in the home result in learning trajectories that are frequently complicated and non-linear' (Gouthro *et al.* 2006:116).

> *'The completion rate for part-time students is so low, but that's not necessarily anything to do with the university, that's because there's so much else going on in that person's life that sometimes it just becomes impossible for them to finish.' (Cath)*

> *'I think it's very easy if you've got nothing else in your life, if you're obsessed by your PhD, which you've got to be, but when you've got other things in your life*

that makes it very difficult and very complicated, and reflectively, unnecessary. I think it's, as one of my colleagues said, "PhDs were meant for single men who live in the university, they weren't made for women with kids and a full time job." (Jan)

'I think part-time is harder than full time. And then being a mum on top of that adds an extra…it's not a burden, is it? But it's an extra thing you've got to juggle.' (Sara)

Women therefore have a different experience of being a student and their lack of belonging is apparent when listening to their accounts of their involvement in the PhD process. This is an important factor to be aware of when considering the communities of practice, they are about members actively learning from one another, creating new knowledge. For this to happen successfully, members must have access to the community and they must participate in that community. The women in this study struggled to participate in the communities of practice due to external demands on their time in the form of childcare, familial responsibility and employment. This limited exposure to the community of practice meant the women could not experience a shared competence with other members and therefore lacked mutual engagement. This led to a distance from what Wenger (2008) describes as 'joint enterprise'. This lack of feeling a part of something, of not creating new knowledge is a limiting factor when studying for a part-time PhD where new knowledge is the ultimate goal. In this lack of joint enterprise, the women also fail to encounter the various approaches, research methods and ways of working utilized by the other students. They therefore do not benefit from what Wenger (2008) terms a 'shared repertoire'. Feeling distanced from the community and not experiencing a shared repertoire can limit the women's approach to their own studies as their resources and knowledge are gleaned from a smaller number of sources, often just their supervisors and their own literature searches. Discussions around methodology, research approach and ethical considerations should form part of a PhD students experience as they learn to critique their own thinking alongside the work of other students. The women in this study,

in lacking a shared repertoire, did not encounter such discussions and interaction, leading to a more isolated and peripheral experience as a student.

> *'As a part-timer you don't ever quite get the same experience, you're not engaged with the institution because you're not there. If you're full-time you're completely immersed in its culture and values and activity, and as a part-timer you're only ever stood by the side of the pool dipping your toe in.' (Cath)*

> *'It's a drop in the ocean every now and then. "Oh, here's a drop of being a student!" And then you're back to work role, mum, the rest of it.' (Laura)*

> *'Being a part-time PhD student and being a mum… it's difficult. It's complex, it's hard work.' (Rachel)*

6.6.2 Part time

Undertaking a doctorate on a part-time basis has been identified as a hugely challenging route compared to that of full-time study.

> 'Part-time academic study is a major life decision. It involves considerable investment both in financial and in personal terms and the journey towards completion can be long and demanding' (Gatrell 2006:1).

Adult students are very often part-time and are not able to separate themselves from their existing responsibilities, whether they be familial, financial or occupational (Kember 1999). As a result, the studying becomes another task they must deal with and integrate into an already complex web of commitments. There are a number of factors affecting a student's decision to enroll part-time, including existing work commitments, financial constraints and familial responsibilities (Gardner and Gopau 2012; Philips & Pugh 1998).

These issues prevent them from dedicating themselves fully to the PhD, instead they commit to undertake the PhD on a part-time basis.

> *'I think, as a part time student, it's a very difficult journey, it's a very lonely journey.' (Jan)*

> *'The lives of part-time PhD students are so outside the university, I really envy people who do PhDs full-time. I don't think they know how lucky they are.' (Elizabeth 36)*

As indicated in the literature, institutions consider a certain demographic of PhD student as the 'norm' in academia, the young, male, full-time, funded student who lives locally and is without dependents (McCulloch & Stokes 2008). Students who do not conform to this stereotype are faced with barriers as the institutional infrastructure and processes are not constructed to serve a student who is very often not on campus in the daytime, has little opportunity for networking and cannot attend research seminars, conferences and sometimes regular meetings with their supervisor. This culminates in a feeling of disconnectedness with the institution and the process overall, leaving them 'invisible' (Neumann & Rodwell 2009).

Curran (1987) highlights a number of incorrect perceptions that are held about part-time students:

1. Part-time students are less committed and motivated.

In juggling work and familial responsibilities to study, these students demonstrate huge dedication and drive.

> '*You have to be very, very motivated and manage your time really well and kind of know what you're going to do when you're going to do it and why you're going to do it. Start at 7.00pm and finish at two in the morning. That's what you have to do. Then get up and go to work.' (Nikki)*

2. Part-time students are so removed from University life they do not take full advantage of institutional resources and activities.

These students often sacrifice weekends and holidays to ensure they utilize all resources and facilities available to them.

> *'I missed Family time, so a lot of…they'd sit down to watch a television programme and you can hear the laughing, you can hear the fun, and you know you've just got to get on with reading and with some writing. You don't see what you're missing until…until something is said or until…Further down the line you realised how many trips you missed, or until they say something. "You don't do that with us anyway, Mum." (Naomi)*

3. Part-time students are disadvantaged by their other obligations

They usually welcome the change of pace, the opportunity to learn and the 'escape' that the PhD provides.

> *'It's a platform for me to learn more about myself. As me. Not as a mum or a partner or anything. Just as me, as someone who wants to achieve an academic challenge.' (Grace)*

There are many 'how to' books regarding PhD study but very few include more than a few pages about studying part-time. Suggestions made by Philips & Pugh (1998) to help a part-time PhD student manage the process, include choosing a topic relating to their work and setting aside specific periods of time, committing to use that time for study. Theoretically this is sound advice, however many of the women embarked on a PhD as something for them that had nothing to do with their existing work, it was not prioritized in their lives in terms of time allocated to it regularly.

'It's not work, because work is what I do when I go into work. It's something I do for me. The PhD is something I've started almost as a hobby, because I wanted to be part of the learning community, I wanted something to be my identity.' (Paula)

'I liked the idea of working on something that was completely unrelated to my work, something that I was interested in.' (Lynette)

Gatrell (2006) suggests part-time PhD students join reading groups, attend seminars, regularly present their work and maintain some presence at the institution. This can prove difficult for part-time students as academic and social integration is not always possible (Ampaw and Jaegar 2012) and is made harder by the University infrastructure and procedures, as highlighted by Wenger, 'relations of non-participation are mediated by institutional arrangements' (Wenger 2008: 169). This leads to the different approach many women in this study had to adopt as they were unable to make a contribution to the University research culture due to conflicting familial demands.

'From a practical point of view I can't attend. Some of the things are at half past four, that's great, except I have to be home for my daughter. So it's not that I'm excluded, it's just that I find it difficult to be included. So in terms of student experience, personally no, but that's not to say that there isn't one available, it's just that I can't participate.' (Moyra)

These conflicting demands leads to the interruption of one task by the demands of another and can cause anxiety and have a negative effect on the person's feelings towards the task (Williams *et al.* 1991). Having to manage multiple goals at once, such as in this study, the women had to manage tasks including helping children with their homework whilst responding to work e-mails and considering how to structure their most current PhD chapter, can slow the rate of progress of each task, causing distress to the individual (Carver & Scheier 1990). The psychological difficulty of switching off from everyday

work and tasks to concentrate on the PhD is what Philips & Pugh (1998) describe as 'self-defeating'.

> *'I'll read stuff that I've written and go "I don't remember that." But that's the problem with being part-time. I think I waste a lot of time just trying to orientate myself, getting myself to where I was last time.'(Emma)*

> *'One of the issues I've found is sometimes continuity of thought.' (Denise)*

> *'You just get into the middle of something and then you've got to stop to do something else, and it's very, very frustrating.' (Eileen)*

Watts (2008:369) describes one of the main challenges of being a part-time student as having to 'make the psychological adjustment of constantly switching from one mindset to another'. Having to work on the PhD within small chunks of time rather than dedicating large blocks of time to the process, made progress slow for the women. They found this difficult to manage as they felt they often produced work that did not reflect their true ability but due to time constraints was all they could produce under the circumstances. The one step forward, two steps back is a common feature of studying part-time and is made all the more challenging when the responsibilities of motherhood are making further demands on time.

> *'There seems to be a consistent failure to understand part-time students' needs. Looking after my children is a job I have to do seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. There is no such luxury as days off. It's not like being able to take annual leave from a full-time job, and when you have a child with special needs you can't just palm them off on a neighbour or friend. My supervisors understand this, but the Graduate School doesn't. No consideration whatsoever is given to the needs of part-time students. It does sometimes make me question what I pay my fees for.' (Vanessa)*

Allocated time is a difficult premise for mothers due to the unpredictable nature of caring for children. Illness, school events and after school activity can throw even the most carefully scheduled week out of synch, leaving the women feeling frustrated at the lack of available time for them to study.

> *'I think nearly losing my mind on a few occasions! Just with the stress. There's times where I had to sit up all night literally to complete a bit of work, and then go into work, because simply I had no other window in which I could do anything. And I've done that, and I've been physically and mentally exhausted, so that has been tough.' (Eileen)*

> *'I can't come in and stay as long as I want. I know some of my colleagues are single and they don't have…well, they might be married, but they don't have children. They don't have to rush home to make sure there's pick-ups from child-minders and make tea and then get ready for Brownies and all that malarkey in the evening, and do homework… and the same at the weekend, you've got all the activities at the weekend and stuff. So I do find…I feel frustrated at times because I don't have that time.' (Mary Ann)*

Part-time doctoral students often feel removed from research cultures in academic institutions, there is very little interaction with reading groups, research seminars and informal peer networking events (Deem & Brehony 2000). They therefore fail to experience practice as connection, developing and exposing a shared repertoire (Tummons 2012). These students are often considered a risk by institutions as completion rates are lower than full-time students and they take longer to complete overall. Timescale is crucial as institutions consider full-time students less risk in terms of timely completion therefore being in a position earlier to contribute to the university research profile (Watts 2008). This periphery position held by the women in this study led to, in many cases, the institution perceiving them as less committed.

'I remember going to one of the introduction sessions and they said, "One in ten conducting part time PhDs passes, the group of highest dropout is middle aged women with kids," so the whole of the room you divided, there was me waving in the corner going, "Oh, that's me!". (Jan)

'I had an induction thing and their focus was very much, "You are supposed to be in your early thirties. You are all supposed to be single; you are all supposed to be full time students. "Well, I'm old. I'm in my late thirties. I work full time. I'm a part-time student", they don't know what to do with you. The attitude of the university is to take a one size fits all approach.' (Therese)

As legitimate peripheral participants, all doctoral students are given the opportunity to learn by engaging in research seminars, conferences, reading groups, poster presentations and supervisory meetings. These all provide a social context for participants to contribute and learn however, as argued by Teeuwsen *et al.* (2014) participation is dependent on a number of variables not always within the control of the students as it is often the institutions who determine the research training, availability of networks and opportunity for involvement in research practices. There are therefore significant differences in the level of participation in the community of practice at doctoral level. Full-time students without familial responsibilities can be full members and progress to becoming 'old-timers' as their participation and contribution develops. Part-time students, specifically those with domestic roles involving childcare that restricts their access to the institution, tend to have limited peripheral participation or no membership in the community of practice. This can impede a part-time student's progress and learning as 'it is the fact of becoming a member that allows participation and therefore learning to take place' (Fuller *et al.* 2005:51).

6.6.3 Supervisors

The supervisory role is crucial in the PhD process, 'if interpersonal compatibility with your supervisor is missing, everything else to do with being a postgraduate is perceived negatively' (Philips & Pugh 1998:10). Challenges faced by supervisors of non-traditional students include differences in background, motivations and approaches to study (Petersen 2014). Support, understanding, encouragement and clarity are key attributes in the relationship between the PhD student and their supervisor, it is also very important that supervisors understand that not everyone fits the mold of young, male and studying full-time and their expectations of the student's progress are adjusted accordingly (Delamont 1989; McCulloch & Stokes 2008). This is supported by Deci & Ryan (1985) who suggest that interpersonal structures such as communications and feedback instill feelings of competence and can enhance intrinsic motivation. This links into the supervisory role as all stated the importance of the supervisor and placed value on their supervisor encouraging them. Thus demonstrating the role of master practitioner in the creation and development of a learning environment that encourages peripheral participants to become involved, engaging in joint enterprise within the community of practice. Master practitioners are 'living testimonies to what is possible' (Wenger 2008:156) therefore the role of the supervisor is not just functional, it is one of aspiration and expectation and can have a profound effect on a student's belief in themselves and the PhD community of practice.

> *'Believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself.' (Kate)*

> *'I think the supervisor's role is crucial. I mean Robert has believed in me when I've not believed in myself at times. He pushed me to think.' (Eileen)*

Managing your supervisor well and developing and maintaining a supportive, positive, constructively critical relationship over time is essential to help you produce a good quality thesis (Wisker 2001:29). Many of the women spoke positively about their

supervisors, signposting support, responsiveness and knowledge as key criteria for 'good' supervision.

> *'I was quite lucky because I had two supervisors. Both very different but both very knowledgeable in what they do, so I couldn't have asked for better really.' (Nikki)*

> *'I think you need someone to bounce ideas off. You need someone to sign-post things at times when you're struggling. I think my supervisor has been fabulous. He's been absolutely brilliant.' (Helen)*

The supervisory role is complex as it requires a navigation through the various stages of the doctorate process, supporting the needs of the student through each stage (Philips & Pugh 1994). Supervisory feedback can enhance intrinsic motivation if it is positive and supports the student's autonomy rather than being perceived as controlling (Ryan 1992).

> *'I can e-mail them at pretty much anytime, and they are great. This year has been really good because I've met with them both together. I get very good personal support.' (Moyra)*

Supervising part-time students can be a challenging task for supervisors as they guide them through periods of isolation (Teeuwsen *et al.* 2014). This was a key issue for the women in this study, the lack of frequency with which they engaged with their supervisors often put pressure on both parties to manage the process carefully, ensuring progress was made without unrealistic expectations of workload.

> *'In many respects it's been good here as a PhD student, largely because my supervisors are not only experienced and knowledgeable, but also understand my circumstances and don't have unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved when you have children to look after.' (Vanessa)*

> *'I think my supervisor is great, but I don't see him that often.' (Emma)*

Many of the women lacked confidence when beginning the PhD and this reflected in their approach to the institution and their supervisors. They felt they had to do what the supervisors said even if it meant 'jumping through hoops' and producing extra work not relating to their study. The supervisor's role is one of power and the women, in recognizing this power, made exceptions for the way the supervisors behaved, never thinking to question them or complain, it was seen as 'the way things are'.

> *'I didn't have a particularly good supervision time. The problem was that they all thought very differently about how I should approach things, the three of them approached it differently.' (Sara)*

There can also be difficulties when students have to manage relationships with two different supervisors as it often involves navigating the relationship the supervisors have with each other. Joint supervision can cause problems due to each person giving conflicting advice as they perceive different routes the work can take. Another issue with having more than one supervisor is a diffusion of responsibility, where each supervisor assumes the other is taking charge of the project, this then leads to a lack of an overall academic view, so the student has to do more self-evaluation to ascertain a good level of work (Philips & Pugh 1998:110).

> *'My director of studies, he call's these meetings, sits there bewildered, one of the other guys rips into me because he's not interested, he wants me to do something else, and then this other woman says, ''Well, have you thought about this''. So I can't say I've had anything productive out of any supervisory meetings.' (Cecilia)*

There can also be difficulties if the supervisor is held in high regard within their field as there will be more demands placed on their time. 'Sometimes the most eminent person is the busiest and can afford the least time for supervision' (Wisker 2001:30).

'Some people talk about having a very close relationship with their supervisor, and you get to know each other really well. And sometimes when you have someone that's very well known in the field, in which ever area you're looking at, they can't…they don't have the time for that close relationship because they're big. I suppose my supervisor's role…she was always there but there was always the expectation because we were in higher education that you should just get on with it, and you'd send her stuff and she wouldn't get back to you.' (Naomi)

Institutions have targets relating to PhD progression, with increased emphasis on timely completion (Nettles and Millet 2006) and inevitably the timescale for completion will be enforced and communicated via the supervisor. Their approach to dealing with the student will reflect the time constraints, especially for part-time students. 'Quality assurance procedures put focus on the functional approach which risks limiting the student experience' (Lee 2008:276). Traditional supervision pedagogies assumed PhD students to be autonomous, prepared scholars from the beginning, therefore requiring little in the way of active supervision (Manathunga *et al.* 2013).

'I'm 48, I'm not like an undergraduate who's never had professional dealings with people – but I often find that I'm the one driving supervisory meetings, saying, "I've done this, this and this, and I need to do that, that and that. What do you think?" I get hints and tips, but very minimal direction. I don't know whether that's normal or not.' (Vanessa)

'The experience with my supervisor was difficult. I felt if I had to ask her anything I always had to think about what I said because quite often I'd get this big cathartic response back.' (Denise)

The women therefore felt frustration at the conflicting approach taken by some institutions whereby the focus was on a timely completion yet the supervision was often vague and lacking in direction. This experience left the women feeling alone and often adrift in the process and enhanced the lack of confidence they felt.

6.6.4 Institution Infrastructure & Support: One size does not fit all

When considering the ways in which H.E. institutions can improve their processes, it is important to acknowledge that the needs of part-time students vary enormously as they face often complex personal, cultural, financial and motivational problems that current University policies and procedures do not address (Court *et a*l. 2013). One aspect of PhD procedure that occurs in most institutions is that of progress reporting. It is acknowledged that monitoring processes, whether they are monthly or annually, are important checkpoints to ensure student progression (Green and Powell 2005). Whilst the process ensuring the student maintains engagement by certain administrative requirements is logical in theory, in practice the process of following student progress is diverse and often not appropriate for the student in question. Institutions have programmes with criteria that students must engage with to successfully progress from one year to the next. These milestone activities range from personal development planning to poster presentations, with each being a standard requirement regardless of the students' previous experience or employment. Not considering a bespoke approach to student development leaves students feeling as if some of the tasks are simply box ticking exercises with little value or meaning to the overall process. They often highlight how little the institution acknowledges the differing needs of part-time students. In identifying these needs, the institution can demonstrate a shift towards a more progressive environment, reflecting what Wenger describes as 'giving new wings' instead of being 'hostages to the past' (Wenger 2008:157).

> *'Even the way the induction was structured, it was assuming you were a continuing student, and also that you were locally based and full-time. So it ignored the part where you were part-time, it ignored that you wouldn't be on campus. So there was a really big gap for me in what they delivered and what I needed from that programme.' (Kate)*

> *'I think part of my own anxiety was because I was so distant from the whole process.' (Jan)*

'I think universities are coming to this understanding that a lot of people work and that they need support outside standard working hours, but as a mum, you don't switch off, do you? It's not a nine to five job. It's very difficult, I think, supporting mums'. (Eileen)

A study on doctoral women's stress (Wall 2008) found that the women were expected to leave their family lives 'at the door' which caused tensions as this requires a splitting of roles. This was a concern for many women in this study.

'I think you can be a part-time worker, you can be a part-time student, but you can't be a part-time mum. It's all the time. Even when you're not physically doing stuff with the kids, you're still Mum.' (Laura)

Wall (2008) found that the women wanted a 'blending of public and private lives and an acknowledgement of their interconnection' (2008:226). This lack of institutional understanding of the needs of female doctoral students with children is a key issue and is evidenced by the numerous administrative and bureaucracy hurdles they discussed during the interviews.

'They absolutely insist on eight meetings a year. For full-time students, it's eight supervisions, for part-time students, it's eight supervisions. When I queried that, do you know the answer they gave me? "Your demographic, your age, your family situation, means that you are less likely to complete. So that's why we want to see you all the while. My needs are quite complex compared to the twenty-one year-old who has only got their head and their arse to worry about. And their answer to that is to make me come twice as much as I think is necessary. It just seems ill thought through. So really, there just seems to be like…rigidity and a real lack of flexibility …you know?'. (Therese)

'I think if you were a full-time PhD student you would be attached to a department and you would have access to a lot more things. So I think maybe they should engage their part-time PhD students a lot more to deliver things in their department. That's something I haven't really had the opportunity to do.' (Denise)

'There was very little accommodation of part-time…. the whole institution is not set up for part-time mature people studying. It just felt like you were completely peripheral.' (Trish)

Progression reports are a requirement of many institutions and are considered good practice by QAA (QAA 2004). However, the level of additional administrative tasks that are a required for annual progression can be repetitive and often do not reflect the situation of the student. Skills logs and personal development planning are meant to encourage students to think about their own skill base in relation to enhancing their employability on graduation. Most of the women in this study were already in employment, indeed, one of the main reasons people enroll on a part-time PhD programme is due to employment restricting their ability to study on a full-time basis. Personal development planning was seen by the women as something that might benefit a postgraduate student who has moved through academia without gaining outside employment, they felt that the task held no value for them and considered it a time wasting exercise.

'I find the documentation a real pain, I just thought, "What the hell am I doing this for?" So it's usually times around documentation, rather than the thesis itself. It's the justifying things, it's the putting things on paper for other people to understand which I find difficult.' (Eileen)

'Personal development planning, I can't stand all that. And I kind of felt like I didn't need to do it. I felt like it was like ticking a box on a form. You have to do it or you don't graduate.' (Nikki)

Most institutions now have a programme for doctoral students that incorporates study sessions/training sessions with research seminars and reading groups. The women acknowledged that the sessions would be useful, however the timing meant they were inaccessible for those responsible for childcare.

> *'After I had my child, I couldn't go to my support sessions because they were on the wrong day for my child care. I think I really could have, you know I think I could have got more from…If I had had more collaborative discussions and engaged more.'(Lynn)*

> *'There are lots of sessions put on, but it's not user friendly, I mean, a lot of the PhD sessions I would have liked to have gone to were in the early evening. They're just at completely the wrong time.' (Heather)*

There is possibly no 'right' time to hold sessions for doctoral students, but multiple sessions at different times or more on-line activity would provide access to people who cannot physically get into the institution. Trish suggests expanding the current facilities to incorporate more online learning material and research sources.

> *'We have an online learning environment where you can get to e-journals and e-books and things like that. I think the more that can go online, the better. I mean, I really rely on that. I'm thinking about what else could go online, lectures and podcasts, and maybe there are some discussions that could go online.' (Trish)*

The on-line environment has been utilized to make the more traditional aspects of the PhD such as poster days, more accessible for part-time students. This allows them the opportunity to participate however, they still lack the connection to people through face-to-face discussions about their research.

'Over the past two years there has been a move to that e-learning type of situation, and I do a lot of research from home based on the electronic resources. And things like the poster days that we engage in, there's now an online poster day which I probably will be doing next year because I don't have the time to physically come in here.' (Moyra)

On-line submission of research posters is a step forward but the facilitation of discussion around the poster would require execution of the poster presentation through an on-line interactive forum, ensuring all parties were available to engage in discussion. It is apparent from the women's experiences that a more bespoke approach to the administration of a part-time PhD would streamline the overall processes, ensuring the tasks required enhanced the students' experiences rather than detracting from their limited time. The boundaries of the PhD community of practice should not be confined to on-campus locations. By creating online communities of practice the spatial limitations are removed and the community of practice becomes a more open environment for participation regardless of physical location. A number of practical contributions to improve the current experience for mothers studying for a part-time PhD are discussed during the summary of this chapter.

6.7 Summary of Findings

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort. The motivation of the women in this study lay in the need to examine who they were and what they were capable of, exploring new opportunities and ways of being. This reflects the thinking of Wenger (2008), who discusses learning and education as a process of identity formation whereby through 'exploring possibilities and reinventing the self' one can create different futures (Wenger 2008:273). Overall the women in this study felt their experience of part-time PhD study was not a satisfactory one, their belonging was peripheral and their sense of identity was not reflecting that of a student. Their experience did not reflect the normative process of communities of practice, instead they endured marginalities of experience. This research therefore provides both H.E. institutions and other mothers considering a route into part-time PhD study a clear insight and understanding into what the existing issues are around mothers and the part-time PhD process, evidencing clearly the links between the communities of practice framework, motivation and identity.

To understand communities of practice and learning as belonging, one must look beyond the community of practice to broader structures and processes, using engagement, imagination and alignment as a focus (Tummons 2012). The difficulties with engagement outside the community of practice are linked to the limitation on the number of activities one can be involved in and the number of relationships that can be sustained. Although this could be seen as a weakness, it also enables identity formation as we adopt and select enterprises that help 'construct an identity of competence' (Wenger 2008:175). This reflects the difficulties the women had in engagement with the student experience, they had so many other commitments, they did not have the capacity to engage in student activities, thus losing an opportunity for competence development. They recognized the importance of student communities of practice as vehicles for identity formation yet their situations denied them the engagement they required. Despite a lack of engagement, their

involvement in PhD study had an impact on their in-group identity (Turner 1987), as they struggled to maintain the desired characteristics for the various in-groups within their lives. This was a source of frustration and isolation as the women felt the PhD caused a lack of connection in their existing social groups and experienced a distancing of themselves from others as a result of attempting to incorporate the PhD into their lives.

Imagination plays an important role in how we make sense of the world and the potential for learning (Wenger 2008). It extends the shared reality experienced during mutual engagement to include the social world and one's experiences within it. Thus the women in this study can bring prior experiences and knowledge to enhance the student community of practices rather than seeing their student identity as disconnected from the other aspects of their lives. In combining the two, the women could determine an identity that reflects the complexities of the mother and student role in what Wenger (2008) describes as 'the actual and the possible' (2008:178) rather than trying to split them into separate ways of being. This requires the universities to acknowledge the women as having prior experience and knowledge and recognizing the value in this, making the participation in the PhD communities of practice more realistic by introducing flexible timing and locations, thus supporting their need for mutual engagement.

Alignment recognizes that individuals can position themselves within a number of broad systems of belief, activity and discourse which in turn affects our actions and our identity (Morton 2011). As individuals, we adopt viewpoints or decide allegiance for groups and it is this choice of alignment that determines our sense of belonging. Through alignment, participants become connected due to the broader range of enterprises they are affiliated with, making engagement with others a more accessible process. Reflecting on the student experience of the women in this study, they were unable to align the student communities of practice with other aspects of their lives, therefore limiting their scope for mutual engagement.

Understanding PhD students' needs is a crucial step in securing a solid base of research students for years to come. As a cohort, women with children will continue to aspire to

undertake doctoral study yet the barriers facing them are many. The women were unable to participate in the formal communities due to their domestic obligations. They identified the need for 'free' communities to aid their development and to share ideas and research yet there was a lack of these informal groups available to them. The infrastructure and frameworks constructed by the institution to aid students' integration into the community of practice can greatly affect a participants learning experience, as highlighted by Fuller *et al.* (2005:51) 'the processes, relationships and experiences which constitute the participants sense of belonging underpin the nature and extent of subsequent learning'.

6.7.1 Table of findings

Theme	Analysis	Women's perspective
Learning as Doing: Motivation		
Autonomy	The women in this study sought to establish some control and enhance their lives by undertaking a challenge autonomously that allowed them feelings of self-worth. Many of the women described the PhD as 'theirs'.	*'I wanted to do something for myself, something that wasn't to do with the kids' (Paula)*
Competence	The need to feel more then 'just a mum' pushed the women to seek out challenges that would expand their own sense of accomplishment. 'Challenge' was a word frequently used, the women wanted to demonstrate a competence and capability intellectually.	*'I think mainly the motivation has been, for myself, to challenge myself to do something I didn't think I was capable of.' (Helen)*
Relatedness	The women experienced feelings of isolation and discussed how much they wished they could discuss their work and experiences with others. This is a key factor of Self-Determination Theory yet the current framework for PhD study in many institutions does not reflect the diversity of research students. There are opportunities to attend training sessions/workshops/research seminars to enable students to network and forge working relationships with their peers that are scheduled at times that make it impossible for the part-time student mothers to attend. This results in a lack of connectedness and belonging.	*'I don't think I felt part of anything, I was too isolated. And I didn't get to talk about my research until I sat down with a supervisor, so I didn't get to share it with other people'. (Patricia)*

Theme	Analysis	Women's perspective
Learning as Becoming: Identity		
Role of Mother	The women discussed not fitting in to what was described by a few as 'the mummy club'. This club consisted of the 'other mums' in the playground who often did not work and could not relate to the work/study lifestyle adopted by the women in this study. Most of the women highlighted how they didn't tell people they were doing a PhD to maintain the balance of the in-group relationship, they thought it would stop them 'fitting in'.	*'I think some people expected me to, I don't know, almost stop and make do. You know, your life is sort of now complete because you have a child'. (Moyra)*
Role of Student	The women expressed feelings of exclusion from the student in-group and student identity. They felt they were doing the work of the student but did not demonstrate the in-group characteristics of the full-time students.	*I see myself as fitting a PhD in around the rest of my life, whereas in a lot of cases I think that, most of my students, because they're on full-time programmes, they have more time to spend on their studies than I do on my PhD. (Rachel)*
Role of colleague	The women who worked (65% full-time, 21% part-time) often experienced animosity from colleagues due to their PhD study. Resentment of time taken out of the working week to research and jealousy of their aspirations for personal development were two contributing factors in colleagues causing some of the women involved in the study much distress.	*'Because I don't just go home and watch Coronation Street or talk about diets, it's this kind of…… It is something that can be seen as threatening'. (Eileen)*
Role of friend/daughter/wife/sister	The social factor of the women's lives was affected hugely by the PhD with many opting out of social engagements. This led to some losing touch with friends or carrying guilt with them for not 'being there' for family.	*'I feel I have to go make it up to people: relatives I've neglected, friends I've neglected. I feel like I have made sacrifices, people have not seen as much of me'. (Emma)*

Theme	Analysis	Women's perspective
Learning as Belonging: Student Experience		
Part-Time	University assumptions around availability of students – lack of bespoke programme for part-time students. Lack of contact with other students, no opportunities for peer-support. Lack of opportunity for inclusion in doctoral research training programmes due to restrictive timetable, leaving the women feeling excluded from the 'research community'.	*I think, as a part time student, it's a very difficult journey, it's a very lonely journey. They know you have children but they don't want them to feature in any way during the process, and they don't want your full time job to feature in any way in the process. And so, part time is a nightmare. (Jan)*
Supervisors	A diverse range of experience from supportive to vague and unconstructive. There was an emphasis on the women trying to maintain focus with differing supervisory agendas.	*I don't actually think my supervisors are that good. (Therese)* *'My supervisor had faith in me' (Laura)*
Infrastructure and support	Set number of meetings with supervisors, excessive form filling, personal development planning directed at younger students yet to have entered employment, 'hoops' to jump through that do not benefit the part-time student who is often already in employment and time-poor	*The way that they focus PhDs or PhD studies is on that new graduate and not on someone who has perhaps has had a period of time, taken family life and then come back to study. You know, been on a journey. So, in a way, I think they've got to…not treat everybody the same. That's my biggest frustration, I suppose. (Heather)*

Theme	Analysis	Women's perspective
Learning as Experience: Feelings, beliefs and impressions		
Guilt	They highlighted how they often felt on the periphery of their family lives as their time and headspace was filled with PhD work. Societies image of a 'good mother' and 'good wife' - this reminds the women that they are 'falling short'.	*The cost of not being with my kids, and sometimes being with them but not being with them in my head, is worrying. (Jan)*
Motherhood v's PhD	Lack of time & sacrifice- Trying to 'squeeze' PhD study into an already busy lifestyle	*'I would say I've made sacrifices, yeah. I think the main bit is that it takes time to study, to write, and you have to find that time in your life. And if you're working full time, you've still got a family, you've still got a home, you've still got some things that really need your attention, you know, you just can't do everything'. (Denise)*
Lack of self- belief & confidence	Past experiences shaping self-doubt. Imposter Phenomenon.	*I didn't realise, the self-doubt, there'd be so much self-doubt where you just think "Oh my God, this is never going to happen. What was I thinking when I signed myself up for this?" (Jo)*

This table provides an overview of each theme from the research, supported by a quote from the participants to provide an example of how the theme was articulated through the women's own words.

6.7.2 Recommendations

There are a number of approaches that can be adopted by Higher Education Institutions to ensure the journey taken by part-time PhD students who have familial responsibilities is one that is supported by the institution. The following discussion highlights a number of practical contributions that have arisen from discussions with the women respondents. They demonstrate what the women feel are areas requiring improvement in the doctoral experience and are therefore a starting point for institutions to re-evaluate their current offering to doctoral students.

Peer Mentoring

One of the key problems identified by the women respondents was the isolation felt during the process of working towards a doctorate. Part-time study has been recognized as a difficult path due to the varying commitments most students have to juggle alongside the PhD. Sporadic involvement with the institution then leaves students feeling remote from the student community. The women spoke of not having anyone to relate to about their experience, of not knowing if their feelings were a normal part of the process, if feeling guilty about their children and worrying about whether they were intellectually capable was normal or whether it was an indication of them not being suitable doctoral candidates. Having a mentor who understands not only the process of doctoral study, but who has experienced it in a similar way to a student they have been assigned to, would provide a much needed perspective (Gardner 2008b). Membership in a community of practice demonstrates a level of competence which develops through sustained engagement and interaction with other members (Yakhlef 2010). Newcomers to a community of practice, which in the context of this study, are mothers studying for a part-time PhD, have to become involved and participate in order to legitimately understand the knowledge and processes involved. The role of 'masters' or 'old timers' is to provide examples of knowledge, behaviour and collaboration, sharing their experiences to help the newcomers in their transition to full membership (Wenger 2008). Providing the mothers or 'newcomers' with a mentor would help them understand the 'culture of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991) providing a view of what other learners are doing, opportunities for

development, access to resources for learning and what is needed to become full practitioners. This need for support from existing members or 'old timers' would help the women in their progress in the community of practice from peripheral participation to full membership, thus benefiting from mutual engagement and a shared repertoire (Tummons 2012). Talking to like-minded individuals who can reassure and relate to your own experiences is a huge source of comfort and support and would be a good link from the student to the institution. They would feel less isolated and less removed from the whole process (Hill & Haigh 2012).

Research Support Groups

Interpersonal aspects are crucial to a student's sense of belonging and well-being. Alongside this is the key requirement to talk about one's research regularly, which helps with the formulation of ideas and application of concepts. Discussing one's work with interested parties outside of the supervisory meetings is an important and highly beneficial part of the doctoral process. A big concern of the women in this study was their lack of involvement in research seminars and reading groups organised by the faculty. These tend to be formalised with set meeting times and structure and are usually held during daytime hours in the week. This lack of joint enterprise left the women on the periphery of any community of practice as they could not physically participate in the community of learning, what Wenger (2008) defines as learning as belonging. One of the women in this study took on a postgraduate student representative role and arranged study support group meetings at weekends to allow the part-time cohort of doctoral students the opportunity to meet up, discuss and share their research. She said these meetings proved to be very popular and provided a much needed support network for those not involved with the university on a day-to-day basis. This focus on joint enterprise provided participants with a secure community to share and develop knowledge.

Encouraging loosely organised, collaborative research groups like this can provide a safe environment for students to share their work (Conrad & Phillips 1995). It also takes the

pressure off supervisors who are often the only other source of support, information and guidance, however these groups do not always require a physical presence as there are many virtual support groups and networks. On-line or virtual communities can be established as communities of practice without the need for face-to-face interaction. The key aspects of virtual communities of practice is that they remove barriers to participation, making membership accessible to all and in doing so, recognise each individual's uniqueness and the importance of them to the overall communities' goal (Ardichvili *et al.* 2003). Online communities of practice lose the face-to-face aspect of the more traditional structures of social learning, there can be less motivation to remain involved due to the remote aspect of online communities and there can be misunderstandings as there is a lack of social indicators in conversation such as facial expressions and tone of voice. However, they can provide a recorded history of the practice and identity of participants, thus becoming a learning resource to non-members who are not yet involved in the group (Zhang & Watts 2008). This record of activity may also serve as a motivating factor for peripheral members who can reflect on knowledge shared and develop confidence based on their understanding (Wang 2010). Amin & Roberts (2008:363) highlight the variations that can be found with online communities and note that not all can be considered effective communities of practice. They suggest that in the majority of groups, 'conversations circulate rapidly among many participants who barely know each other and who come and go at high frequency'. They state there is little in the way of attempts to control or structure the objectives and knowledge discussed and as a result there is a lack of mutual engagement for an online community to work. They identify 'closed interest groups facing specific problems that are consciously organised as knowledge communities' as a form of online communities of practice that can prove to be an effective space of situated knowledge. Part-time PhD students that participate in online forums or research groups can be allowed the benefits of participating in a community of practice without having to physically participate face-to-face. This can provide members with shared historical and social resources that can sustain mutual engagement.

One of the women in this study belonged to an online support group that was set up by the students themselves. They were all distance learners and they wanted a place to

communicate that was instant and inclusive. She spoke of this group being a huge support to her as she went through the process. The group developed from a tentative place to chat to a strong support network that developed friendships and a sense of community where the participants would critique each other's work and encourage members through the process. In these two examples, it was the individuals' initiative that developed the groups. Institutions should be encouraging and fostering the development of informal support groups, as they can play a crucial part in sustaining a student's course to completion (Cox 2005; Duguid 2008; Raz 2007).

Research Culture

As previously highlighted, discussing one's research and participating in discussions around methodological approaches and theoretical arguments is a crucial part in doctoral student development. For newcomers to legitimately participate, they have to have access to practice, their contributions gaining value the more adept they become. The mothers in this study were often denied this opportunity to contribute to research seminars, training sessions or faculty conferences and therefore the chance to refine their skills and knowledge was minimal (Lave & Wenger 1991). Part-time students have intermittent engagement with campus activity and often little involvement in the research culture due to timings of research seminars that are often scheduled at lunchtimes or early evening. Lunchtimes seminars cannot be attended due to work commitments and early evening sessions often clash with children's after school requirements, therefore leaving little opportunity for students to present their research in a constructive academic context and to participate in discussions around other students' work. These frameworks for research dissemination are crucial for the women to sustain mutual engagement through feedback and discussion around their research because when a number of participants are involved in a discussion there is a negotiation of meaning that enables all members to engage and develop a shared repertoire or joint enterprise (Tummons 2012). This then creates mutual accountability as members participate together in a shared approach to learning, negotiating viewpoints and ideas to create meaning. Institutions could assist students in accessing these research communities of practice by utilising a Skype facility. This would

enable students to participate and present remotely. Podcasts of research seminars could also be created and accessed at later dates for those unable to attend or are unavailable to Skype. Brooks (2010) suggests that participation in a community of practice is recognizable as competence so for the women to have access to the research community of practice they would feel a sense of accomplishment, mutual engagement and accountability. Using digital platforms to engage doctoral students widens participation and creates a research community of practice that spans further than the confines of the campus.

Access Programmes and research training

Many part-time students have not progressed through the same academic institution without a break. Indeed, all of the women in this study had taken time out of academia before returning to postgraduate study. Many of them had a break of more than five years and were therefore not familiar with university procedures, processes and the nuances of university life at their chosen institution. These differ with each institution, but knowing things that an undergraduate moving straight to postgraduate study might already be aware of, is taken for granted. Many postgraduate students are not aware of where to access library cards, how to order academic journals or how often postgraduate research conferences take place. These and many more issues could be dealt with during an access/induction programme, research training and participation in a community of practice. In addition to the more academic knowledge a community of practice can provide, it can also be an invaluable source of information regarding the wider university, and can help with orientation, understanding the administration involved, knowing the skill base and areas of expertise of faculty members and the overall infrastructure of the institution, with old timers knowing the vital bits of information required by novices and often, in remembering their own novice experiences, are happy to share their knowledge for the good of the community. This shared repertoire of resources and knowledge would ensure the women felt involved and informed as they transitioned from peripheral to full members of the community of practice. This kind of programme is already established in many institutions yet the content is not always addressing the most useful points for part-

time students coming back to academia after a break. Institutions should not assume students are already peripheral members and have prior knowledge and should ensure postgraduate students have a full induction into the university policies and procedures that are pertinent to them as doctoral candidates.

Research training is another aspect of doctoral study that has been highlighted as necessary for a smooth transition back to academia yet many institutions fail to recognise the need for training on for example, ethics, methodological approaches and analysis. Often these issues are addressed within subject departments or faculties and the wider student population is not always aware of the training. Whilst the students within those faculties may benefit from the nuances of subject specific training, there is a need for a wider programme that addresses these topics for all doctoral students. It would provide students with, not only training on the areas that they wish to specialise, it would educate them on a range of research methodologies, ethical issues and methods of analysis that they may wish to pursue as a post-doctoral researcher. Much of this is explored during the act of joint enterprise yet for those only involved peripherally, additional training is necessary. Knowledge in these areas will empower students to explore different approaches to research, making them consider their own projects from different angles and with different perspectives.

Senior female academics as role models

There is a wealth of literature highlighting the reasoning behind the lack of senior female academics in Universities. These perspectives have been discussed within the literature review of this thesis and include issues of organizational gendering (Forster 2000; Groombridge 2004; Wall 2008), female faculty members being marginalised (Wolf-Wendel *et al.* 2007), obstacles to career progression (Gardner 2013; Kuhn *et al.* 2009) and being paid and promoted less (August & Waltman 2004). Whilst this information is a concern for female doctoral students from a future employment perspective, it also indicates the lack of senior female academics available for supervision, mentoring, role models and support. A lack of female role models can raise questions around the post-

doctoral employment potential as well as highlighting concerns around the culture of the institution. Female doctoral students looking at institutions to undertake their research may question the gender divide of senior academics, the range of prospective supervisors and the probable opportunities for professional development, as part of a review of their options. Lave and Wenger (1991) identified the importance of social relations of apprentices with other members of the community of practice. The process of legitimate peripherality that newcomers experience helps in their development as they observe and learn from the 'masters' or 'old timers' as well as the more advanced apprentices as they progress to full practitioners. For the women to develop their learning, they need the support and interaction with role model 'old timers', i.e. experienced female academics to ensure their participation increases from peripheral to full practitioner and their learning experience is fulfilling (Keay *et al* 2014). It appears therefore, that visible female faculty can enhance the experience of female doctoral students by providing positive role models in addition to the more functional aspects of research and supervision.

Flexible supervisory meetings

Supervision is a crucial part of the doctoral process and the monitoring of such meetings is a key aspect of many institutional PhD annual review processes. Many of the women respondents in this study felt frustrated at the prescriptive approach to supervisory meetings. Institutions dictated a number of meetings that had to be conducted and reported on across each year. The number of meetings for part-time students averaged one a month which for a part-time student, is often difficult to achieve when juggling the various demands of employment and familial responsibilities. Whilst it is acknowledged that regular contact with their supervisor can improve a student's progression, the pressure to meet these targets often leads to meetings that are not constructive and leave the student feeling they are not keeping up with expectations. It also wastes a supervisors' time if a student is not prepared for a meeting or has no issue they wish to discuss. These issues can have a negative impact on a student's motivation for 'learning as doing' (Wenger 2008) which in turn can affect the motivation of other members of the community of practice. Intrinsic motivation, described in this study using the self-determination theory framework (Deci & Ryan 1996) is a key factor in sustaining members' participation. The

motivation comes from the individuals own desire to learn which is influenced by the institutional infrastructure and support network. The need for supervisory contact varies throughout the process, and this should be acknowledged in the meeting criteria set out by the postgraduate department. There will be times when the student is immersed in analysing data and wishes to establish some findings before discussing it with their supervisor and they have no need for a meeting for three months whilst other stages of the process will require more constant contact. Therefore, a flexible approach to the current number and context of supervisory meetings would provide a more bespoke plan for the student to adhere to. Having a suggested number of six meetings a year (with a minimum of four) that can be face-to-face, telephone, e-mail or Skype allows flexibility for both the student and the supervisor. It saves time for both parties and enhances the quality of the content of the meetings when they do take place.

Bespoke personal development planning

Most part-time students opt for this mode of study due to existing commitments including work responsibilities and childcare. They are usually at a different stage in their lifecycle than the traditional single full-time student who has often continued their academic journey from undergraduate study without a break. They therefore do not have the same personal training needs that the part-time students have. Understanding the nuances between these two different student groups and treating them accordingly would ensure the part-time students had to undertake administrative tasks that they felt benefitted them and provided value to their overall experience, therefore keeping them motivated to continue.

Currently, the women respondents had to fulfil numerous form filling tasks each year in a bid to help them identify skills they had acquired that would benefit them when looking for work. The forms were very much focussed on skills required for academic careers and offered little in the way of innovative thinking for transferable skills outside the academic institution. As the majority already had successful careers and were fully versed in their own skills base, this employability exercise was seen as futile and an unnecessary waste of their limited time. It also suggests to the students that the University do not really know

them as individuals and do not really care. In the current Higher Education market where institutions are having to adopt a more customer-centric approach in their dealings with students, it would seem logical to take a customer-focussed approach to the postgraduate market and attempt to treat them as individuals. The increase in doctoral students has seen employment opportunities expand outside of the traditional academic route. In the UK, only 35% of PhD students will be employed in a research role (Thompson & Walker 2010). Universities should therefore help students identify career paths that reflect a range of options for those with doctoral degrees, not just careers within academia. In broadening the scope of employment opportunities and having a skills audit as a non-compulsory option, those students interested in pursuing other areas of employment would engage with the process and could benefit from additional training or advice offered by the institution.

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort. In securing data from thirty-five women's narratives, this research provides an original insight into the experiences of an obscured and marginalised group. Through the theoretical contribution of the research, based on an application of Communities of Practice (Wenger 2008) combined with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987), a framework has been developed to demonstrate the marginality of experience for these women. The combination of narrative and autoethnographic methods has surfaced original data that highlights the experiences and impact of part-time PhD study on the women's lives. The research demonstrates that the women's involvement in the community of practice was at best, peripheral and this perpetual marginality denied them opportunities for enhanced learning through mutual engagement and development of a shared repertoire. It has become apparent through the research that the normative process of communities of practice is not what the women experienced. The lack of in-group participation, expectations around motherhood and a fractured student experience provided a very different reality of part-time PhD study, exposing the women to 'marginalities of experience' (Wenger 2008) with their

competence never fully realised within the communities of practice context. The contribution to current thinking around part-time PhDs is the critique of extant normative practice, in exploring these issues this research illustrates and exemplifies how these existing processes marginalise mothers doing part-time doctorates and points to new approaches in practice.

6.7.3 A model of understanding mother's marginality of experience

Normative progress in CoP (Wenger 2008)	Social Theory of learning (Wenger 2008)		Normative PhD Community of Practice (Developed from Wenger 2008)	'Marginalities of experience': Mothers studying for a PhD part-time
Newcomer & Peripheral participation ↓ Mutual Engagement ↓ Shared Repertoire ↓ Joint Enterprise ↓ Full membership, leading to participant becoming 'old timer' or 'master practitioner'	Learning as experience	**Meaning** Feelings, beliefs & impressions. Managing guilt, self-doubt and the role of peripheral membership	Our ability both individually and collectively to reflect on the experience of belonging to a community of practice and how it provides meaning in a broader context.	The women's limited peripheral participation left little in the way of meaningful engagement. In attempting to reconcile the mother and student roles the women experienced feelings of guilt, anxiety, and doubt in their ability. Thus their learning experience was complex, disconnected and left them with conflicting emotions.
	Learning as Belonging	**Community** Experience of student mother and the need for legitimate participation in communities of practice	Participation in a community of practice is recognisable as competence, being part of a community of learning instils a sense of belonging and stimulates participation. It is crucial to a members learning and knowledge acquisition that they interact and learn from others.	The women were forced to rely on individual learning resources instead of a shared repertoire due to the lack of social participation. There was a lack of interaction and socialization as they were unable to separate themselves from existing responsibilities. This resulted in them feeling disconnected from the PhD community of practice whilst being perceived as less committed.
	Learning as Becoming	**Identity** Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987) and the role of group membership on mother's identity formation and transition	This reflects a personal history of becoming, created in the context of community. The process of engagement and learning transforms the identity of participants in the PhD community of practice.	The women no longer aligned with existing in-groups as the PhD provided them with a characteristic that was in conflict with existing in-group membership traits. Thus the fragmented identities of the women were in tension with the student role which they could not identify with.
	Learning as Doing	**Practice** Motivation & Self-Determination Theory ((Deci & Ryan 1985). The role of autonomy, competence and relatedness in the mother's experience	Shared resources, knowledge and ideas that sustain mutual engagement and motivation. Members of the community of practice feel encouraged by their participation and are motivated to continue. Motivation comes from participation.	Motivation comes from intrinsic desire for autonomy and competence rather than motivation by participation. They didn't have the support of the community of practice, instead their motivation came from their self-determination to continue.

In the UK Higher Education environment, the PhD journey has common practices that identify and reflect what a PhD community of practice is. By using Wenger's (2008) communities of practice theory as a framework, this approach has been identified by the researcher as the normative PhD community of practice. That is, the experience that Higher Education institutions expect students to engage in, based on existing infrastructures and processes. This model has exposed this normative approach alongside the expected trajectory of a PhD student, moving from newcomer, through the process of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire to the point where one is acknowledged as an 'old timer' or 'master practitioner'. These terms are rather dated and suggest that the experts in the community of practice will be male. A more appropriate term of 'practice expert' or 'complete practitioner' provide a more gender neutral approach.

Alongside this expected path from peripheral to full participation, is the involvement in a social theory of learning. These four areas of learning have been used by the researcher to map the four areas of focus of the women's experiences. Learning as experience, documenting the women's feelings and beliefs, learning as belonging reflecting the women's student experience, learning as becoming using Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987) to understand the women's role conflict and learning as doing evidencing the women's motivation with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985).

In exposing the gap between the expected route for PhD students and the experience of the women in this study, it became apparent that their experience was from a marginalized position. This table reflects that marginality of experience. Mothers have an identity that is not recognized or acknowledged in the normative representation of doctoral study and rather than have an identity which is reaffirmed by and connected into a community of practice, they feel fragmented, disconnected and isolated and report feelings of identity erosion. They experience shifting roles as they are pulled into multiple identities simultaneously and the existing process of doctoral procedures does not improve or support the women going through this. Wenger (2008) suggests that communities of

practice operate on certain levels, building motivation and shaping identity but these are not found to exist for mother's studying for part-time PhDs. The women lacked the opportunity for practice as connection, remaining in perpetual peripherality which impeded their opportunities for learning. Thus a mother's experience of a part-time PhD is a marginalized experience that has an impact on many areas of their lives including their families and relationships, their employment, their motivation for study, their well-being and their identity. The model has been developed to illustrate the use of Wenger's (2008) community of practice components of a social theory of learning. These components have been used as a framework to reflect the key findings of this study, the themes of identity, motivation, student experience and feelings, beliefs and impressions of the women have been established as areas relevant for exploration.

Learning as becoming reflects the role of the PhD in the transition from mother to student identity, considering the women's membership and participation in various in-groups or communities of practice. Their participation is influenced by their learning as belonging, the development of academic networks and links for communities of practice and the women's involvement in them, have an impact on their experience as students. The role of identity in the process of studying for a part-time PhD and the need for a sense of community are factored into the women's learning experience, considering the impact of studying on their lives. Learning as doing considers the women's academic practice, their motivations for embarking on a PhD and how that is influenced and sustained by the academic networks available, their involvement in community of practice groups, their recognition of themselves as having legitimate student identities and the institutional infrastructure that supports their progress. Their learning as experience is then a process of reflection based on the impact of the part-time PhD on their day-to-day lives, their identities, their relationships and their careers.

In linking the themes from the findings of the study to the four components of learning, it demonstrates the correlation between the two and reflects the prominence of the mother's experiences in shaping their own learning. Each component reflects an aspect of their experience and in recognising this, the model was created to map how the components

mirror the themes highlighted by the women as key to their part-time PhD journey. Each area is important to the women as a separate entity but the model helps demonstrate that they encounter these issues, not in isolation, but as part of an overall experience of part-time PhD study. This is an area of focus that Higher Educations institutions should recognize as crucial to the long-term development of part-time PhD students. This model has exposed the marginalized experience of mothers and in evidencing these experiences, it is providing Higher Education institutions with an insight into what is required with regards to changes in infrastructure, process and practice to better support this marginalized cohort of students.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to explore the impact that studying had on their lives, their relationships and their identities and to discern whether the current approach and infrastructure established to support this particular cohort was adequate. Using an interpretative, feminist standpoint methodology, the lived experience of the women was explored alongside an autoethnographic narrative of the researcher. In combining these two methods, the aim was to acknowledge researcher subjectivity whilst allowing the marginalized voices of the women to emerge. The subsequent findings reflect the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, their perceptions of themselves, their shifting identities and their feelings about the process and the implications of PhD study for themselves, their families and their future.

In securing data from thirty-five mothers studying for a part-time PhD, this study has provided other women with an insight into the experience of mothers participating in a part-time PhD programme, de-mystifying the process and normalizing their feelings. Despite the women all coming from a range of backgrounds, occupations, life stages and stage of PhD study, this diversity was not apparent when listening to their experiences of studying for a part-time PhD. There was a clear commonality that linked their narratives, bringing them together and reinforcing their perspectives as reflective of a whole cohort of women with children. This study therefore provides a unified voice, the experiences of thirty-five women, all encountering similar challenges, feelings and barriers to study.

This research provides H.E institutions with data on a particular cohort and practical recommendations on how to improve their processes and infrastructure to support the non-traditional student who may have additional needs outside of the traditional framework currently in existence in many H.E. institutions. This study has also identified the use of the normative community of practice approach to develop a framework that demonstrates the marginality of experience for mothers working towards a part-time PhD.

Historically women experienced discrimination and disadvantage in education due to a gendered society that excluded women from the realm of academia and considered their domestic roles the only recognizable option (Dyhouse 1984; Leadwood *et al.* 2009; Sidgwick 1897). It is apparent that despite a backlash against a patriarchal regime that has witnessed women fighting for equality socially as well as in education and in the workplace, women in modern day Britain still feel under-represented and unsupported in their quest for education (Coats 1994). Issues of gender inequality (Cranny Francis *et al.* 2003; Pascal & Cox 1993; Purvis 2005), constructions of traditional femininity (Rothman 1994; Leathwood & Read 2009) and the expectations of the role of mother (Marshal 1991; Woodward 2002; Short 2005; Millar 2009) all have an impact on the role of women in society and the subsequent view women have of themselves.

Yet, it is in spite of the difficulties listed that women pursue academic interests, demonstrating an even greater commitment as they continue their studies alongside the challenges of juggling multiple roles and responsibilities (Edwards 1993; Leonard 1994; Watts 2008). This has been highlighted during the findings of this study, as the women have acknowledged that despite a satisfaction with their lives, there was a force driving them to undertake a PhD in a bid to satisfy an urge for more. They expressed a desire to be challenged and to prove to themselves what they were capable of, beyond the realms of their current public and private domain. Out of the process of drawing on their experiences, the women in this study began seeing the PhD process through the lens of their own experience. This resulted in affirmation that despite the difficulties, it was a positive thing for them to want more for themselves. Hughes identifies the transition that women experience as they move to a 'utopia of having it all' and she highlights Higher Education as the key to 'the privileged moments of becoming' (Hughes 2002:112).

In identifying Wenger's (2008) Communities of Practice as a framework for discussion, a model was developed as a theoretical contribution of this study to understand the women's experiences of part-time PhD study. This model focused on four key areas, learning as belonging, learning as becoming, learning as doing and learning as experience. Each area related to a major theme in the women's experience, that of identity, motivation,

the student experience and their own feelings and perceptions about themselves and the process. Using this model helped clarify the issues that the women felt were most significant to their experiences and provided a framework for the findings of this research which demonstrate the marginalization of experience for the women.

One of the key findings of this study was the role of Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985) in framing the women's motivation for embarking on a part-time PhD. The theory determines intrinsic motivation as a key driver in the women's approach to study, emphasizing the role of autonomy, the need for competence and the importance of relatedness to the women's progress. Each of the women felt the need to be in control and independent, they looked for a challenge to satisfy that need and continued with the studying despite their need and subsequent lack of support and relatedness from others. Self-determination theory can therefore be utilized to explain the women's motivation for wanting to do a part-time PhD. The key concepts of autonomy, competence and relatedness link to Wenger's (2008) communities of practice theory, highlighting learning as doing as a key factor in the women's experience.

The mothers in this study demonstrated incredible strength and motivation to persevere with their doctorates, it has in fact been described as a 'heroic journey' that women undertake when embarking on PhD study (Heinrich *et al.* 1997). The role of student was not one that fitted into their lives easily, it was seen as something extra, an anomaly that could affect the smooth running of family life and as a result was never made the priority or given the focus required in an 'ideal' student scenario. Their day-to-day commitments encroached on any time that could have potentially been allocated to PhD study and the women allowed it to happen due to the guilt felt by them (Elvin-Nowak 1999). They felt that any time spent on the PhD was selfish as it was time not spent with their children and as a result, worked late at night after the children had gone to bed or they got up and worked in the early hours of the morning to ensure there was no break in the family routine and the PhD therefore had no negative affect on family life (Lemkau & Landau 1986; O'Reilly *et al.* 2005; Pheonix *et al.* 1991). Seeing the PhD as a selfish task fitted into this mindset, the women were used to putting everyone else before themselves, their children's need took priority then their

partners, then work commitments were seen as the next aspect of their lives that required both time and focus. As most of the women in this study worked, many of them full-time, their working lives tied up any spare time they may have had and often added to their overall 'stress' with heavy workloads, uncooperative and often difficult work colleagues and demanding bosses leading to an overloading effect (Rueschemeyer 1981). Whilst it is acknowledged that communities of practice provide a solid foundation for knowledge acquisition and dissemination and for personal development, the current frameworks for communities of practice in higher education appear rather inflexible as they cater for students who are available during typical weekday working hours 9am – 6pm. The premise of communities of practice is to cultivate a process of learning and development that involves members yet it would seem that despite good intentions, the women in this study are prevented from engagement due to familial responsibility and prior working commitments that demand the women's presence during the times the communities of practice convene. Therefore, the infrastructure of the institution and its planned research activities obscure the women from participation and engagement, leaving them in perpetual peripherality. There is a lack of alignment for the women as they cannot link their own PhD study and process of studying with other networks, thus not adding to the research culture of the institution and missing out on opportunities for networking and collaboration. The women also struggled to identify themselves with the role of student, their imagined participation with the community of practice was non-existent and the image they constructed of themselves was one of mother rather than that of student. This prevented them from exploring imagined possibilities as they were not engaged in the process. Thus, the use of Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that due to intrinsic motivation, the women demonstrated a resilience throughout their PhD despite often complex lives and educational journeys and managed the PhD despite the many demands placed on them (Pemberton & Akkary 2010).

The next key theme uncovered by this research is that of belonging, the need for community and a positive student experience. Reflecting on the model developed in this study, the focus on learning as belonging leads to people actively creating and sharing knowledge through social participation in communities of practice. It has been highlighted in the findings of this study that the women felt removed from the student experience, this

lack of mutual engagement with other students at the institution left them without the experience of joint enterprise. They therefore lacked involvement in learning new research approaches, there was little access to resources and little opportunity to discuss their own research methods with anyone other than their supervisory team. This had a direct impact on other aspects of their doctoral experience, their perception of identity, their motivation to continue and their own feelings and self-belief. This therefore highlights how important a sense of belonging is to mothers undertaking part-time PhDs. It is not simply a case of making research seminars accessible, learning as belonging is about practice as connection, the women actively participating in the community of practice and developing a shared repertoire of research methods and resources through joint enterprise (Parker *et a*l 2012; Tummons 2012), linking directly to their intrinsic motivation by enhancing their level of competence. Although PhD research is usually considered an independent task, within a community of practice students develop new ways of thinking by interacting with and contributing to the learning of others, and it is the nature and functionality of these relationships that is critical for a community of practice (Bitterman 2008:316). For a community of practice to exist and evolve, its members must therefore participate in mutual engagement. This study has identified that the mothers studying for a part-time PhD did not engage in mutual engagement, instead their participation was peripheral and their overall experience marginalized.

This reflects another key theme of this study, identity, specifically changing identity. Using Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987) within the communities of practice model, it was identified that mothers studying for a part-time PhD transitioned across a number of in-groups, attempting to fit-in but falling short due to their fractured identities that left them feeling neither a good student, a good friend, a good mum nor a good work colleague. This resulted in them being on the outside of the communities of practice or at best, marginal members, participating from a peripheral position. The institutions the women were registered at therefore played a big role in the women's experience of being a PhD student. Not feeling as if they had a student identity was one of the things all of the women talked about and yet being connected to the institution in some way is key to establishing a sense of belonging to a community of practice. Women students need to

find their student identities however they will not be the stereotypical identities described by McCulloch and Stokes (2006), each woman will have their own ideal of what studying for a PhD means to them and how that is amalgamated into their own existing identity. Part of that identity will be constructed by the discourse with the institution. It is important that the women feel part of the institution, that the student aspect of who they are is part of the University, this will provide a connection that they currently do not experience. Feeling like a student or at least part of the institution will provide the women with a reinforced self-belief that they are recognized by the institution as being capable and worthy of a PhD. This reflects how the women in this study could have been involved in the community of practice, they were all engaged in a process of studying for a PhD and recognised in other students a mutual goal. The problem facing the women however was their lack of engagement with others: they could identify the benefits of mutual engagement with other students, yet their interaction and therefore engagement was minimal or non-existent due to reasons of childcare demands and familial responsibility. They therefore did not sustain mutual engagement long enough to enjoy a sense of joint enterprise with other students and did not benefit from a shared repertoire which would have provided them with access to new methods, different ways of approaching research and resources to aid them with their research work.

Reflecting on the issue of identity, the majority of women felt that they had changed as a result of doing the PhD. This re-working of their identity is what Josselson (1987:179) highlights as a challenging process, 'identity can be modified but it is only with great difficulty and turmoil that central aspects of identity can be opened to question or re-worked'. This echoes the research of Pascall and Cox (1993:120) who identified in women returning to higher Education 'a heightened awareness of the self, a search for a new identity or for the 'real' self that the contingencies of life had suppressed'. It also reflects the work by Maher (2001) in her study on mature women's studies students. The women felt studying had transformed their lives and their consciousness, they challenged their social contexts in a bid to re-define their experiences, demonstrating what Giddens (2009) calls the 'reflexive reordering of self-narratives'. The women's attempts to navigate their way to self-enhancement led them to identify postgraduate education,

specifically doctoral study, as a path to re-establish an identity outside of the domestic sphere. This led to what Tamboukou (1999:137) describes as 'a cultivation of the mind, enabling modes of self-knowledge'. Thus it would appear that studying for a PhD has provided the women with a renewed sense of self, and in re-working their identity, they have an increased confidence to fulfill the role that had shifted when they became mothers.

The last theme used within the model to understand the women's experiences of part-time PhD study is that of learning as experience, considering the women's feelings and beliefs about themselves and the process. They discussed their experiences very honestly, openly admitting feelings of guilt at having to spend time away from their children (Elvin-Nowak 1999; Lemkau & Landau 1986), frustration at the conflicting priorities within their lives (Badinter 2011; Lynch 2008; Stone & Lovejoy 2004) and worries about their own intellectual ability to complete the work. It was only through formulating an image of themselves in the context of the world around them that the women began to understand their roles and explore possibilities within their experience of PhD study. These experiences then shaped how the women felt and what they learnt about themselves in the process (Brooks 2010). The women attempted to establish meaning to their enrolment and involvement in part-time PhD study and in doing so, battled with conflicting emotions as the negotiation of meaning incorporated guilt, anxiety and a lack of self-belief. They had an internal drive to continue yet experienced tension between their motivation and established norms of how they were expected to behave within their mother role. Wenger (2008) identifies the concept of negotiation as 'an accomplishment that requires sustained attention and readjustment' (Wenger 2008:53). Thus the women's negotiation of meaning fluctuated alongside their numerous roles, the meaning of their involvement in part-time PhD study was readjusted depending on their in-group participation.

The women talked about the PhD empowering them, the process of studying for a PhD has provided them with a means of identity expression that had previously been stifled through the adoption of the role of being a mum (Marshall 1991; Rothman 1994). This sense of re-awakening both intellectually and personally provided the women with a renewed sense of positivity and confidence. Undertaking a PhD on top of their already

demanding roles was a way for the women in this study to demonstrate a resistance against the dominant ideology that dictates women's 'natural' place is in full-time motherhood (Hughes 2002a). It provided them with a sense of purpose and intellectual stimulus that lifted them from the often mundane tasks of everyday life. They felt the PhD allowed them a voice, the freedom of expression that the mother role had smothered (Woollett & Pheonix 1991) as it wasn't in-keeping with the in-group identity. 'Women's identities, self-expectation and self-evaluations can change when and as learning occurs' (Hayes & Flannery 2002:54). Therefore, the academic development of the women helped them to see themselves as 'worthy' and to demonstrate positive academic traits, it helped strengthen their own identity as they developed a sense of self-belief.

There were many challenges facing the women in this study, they worked and studied part-time, leaving them feeling that they were on the edges of the student experience, looking in from the outside due to time constraints and institution infrastructure not considering the part-time student worthy of a more bespoke approach to student engagement and involvement in research culture. These are difficulties faced by all part-time students. What this study has recognised, are the additional challenges faced by women with dependent children who wish to undertake a part-time PhD. According to Brown & Watson (2010:402) 'women's academic careers suffer not because they are women, but because they marry and have children'. This is reflected very honestly by Sara, who echoes what many of the women in this study said about the tension between the role of mother and that of PhD student. The issues are far reaching but do not just encompass the women's time restrictions, there are clear areas of improvement required within academia to make Higher Education more accessible to students with childcare responsibilities.

> *'I just think Academia is very elitist. Very elitist. I mean, you're joining their club, aren't you? "Are we going to let you into the club? Do we see you're good enough?" And I find it slightly inflexible, slightly elitist, sadly. And I suppose that's what we struggle with as mums; because we're not the traditional…we're not the traditional student. And I think that's why your research is good, because they*

don't understand you can't drop tools at five o'clock and go to a talk. Because academics are meant to be able to do all this. There's a picture of what an academic student should be doing and that doesn't always fit with being a mum, and I think we're a bit of a mismatch there. And I think that's got to change.' (Sara)

The difficulties faced by the women in this study were not because they were disorganised, not intellectually capable enough or just did not work hard enough, they were because they were responsible for the welfare and upbringing of children. 'Women cannot meet public world obligations without being accused of neglecting their duties in the private domain' (Edwards 1993:63). The responsibility of being a mother means that your day, your week, your year has to be organised around the children you are responsible for. Their needs are paramount and often, due to the influence of the media and societal patriarchal ideologies around women and motherhood, they cannot consider their own needs for fear of feeling selfish and a 'bad mother' for not adhering to the 'ideal mother' image sold to them (Bepko & Krestan 1990; Hays 1996; Pheonix *et al.* 1991; Rotkirch *et al.* 2009). This raises the issue of the perceptions of the women in this study, their understanding of how they should be 'perfect mothers' led to tension between their roles of mother and student. These dual identities often featured 'academic and maternal invisibility' (Lynch 2008) as the women struggled to maintain a student identity alongside their dominant mother identity. The outcome of this meant that the women never fully identified themselves as students as the in-group characteristics were in opposition to the women's existing roles. Thus the role of mother plays a large part in the peripherality of the women as their experience of being a PhD student is marginalised by the existing demands of their mother identity. Women considering embarking on a PhD should therefore accept that their journey will be a different one to that of the traditional PhD student. It doesn't however, have to be an unenjoyable one. Finding a supervisor who is supportive of your situation and an institution that recognises diversity and caters for a range of differing needs are the first steps in the process. In highlighting the issues of marginalisation to women, this study has exposed them in advance, to the potential

problems and obstacles they may face during their studies. Knowledge of such barriers can help women establish strategies and coping mechanisms to overcome such issues, empowering them in the process. This study has therefore opened up a dialogue around issues of marginalization, women will know they will not immediately feel part of the student community, they will recognise that current in-groups will not always share their enthusiasm for their research, they will understand that they are allowed to pursue interests solely for themselves regardless of how guilty they may feel and take comfort from the fact that they are not alone, that there are many mothers in the UK going through exactly the same thing.

It is acknowledged in the HEFCE data (2007) that people enrolled for part-time PhDs have a lower completion rate even without the added complication of familial responsibility, with 76% of full time students completing within ten years whilst only 48% of part time students complete within the same time-frame. Instead of being reticent about the progress of women with children undertaking a doctorate, institutions should approach the situation strategically, looking at how they can best serve this non-stereotypical demographic who are intellectually capable but have numerous time demands and conflicting roles that make student life harder to engage with. 'The global expansion on doctoral graduates is likely to persist as governments invest in increasing the pool of doctoral graduates needed to build globally competitive knowledge economies' (Halse & Mowbray 2011:517). This growing focus on research and doctoral students will mean Higher Education institutions need to support their students and acknowledge that the diversity in the doctoral student population is growing and with that diversity comes a different set of requirements that should be addressed. In recognizing these differing needs, HE institutions should provide a varied support network, utilizing online resources and exposing students to new ways of engaging with the subject, other students and the institution as a whole.

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of mothers studying for a part-time PhD, to highlight the impact studying had on their lives and to explore how H.E. institutions could improve the process for this particular cohort. In securing data from thirty-five women's narratives, this research provides an original

insight into the experiences of an obscured and marginalised group. Through the theoretical contribution of the research, based on an application of Communities of Practice (Wenger 2008) combined with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987), a framework has been developed to demonstrate the marginality of experience for these women. The combination of narrative and autoethnographic methods has surfaced original data that highlights the experiences and impact of part-time PhD study on the women's lives. Key themes of motivation, identity, feelings and beliefs and the student experience were exposed and analysed using the communities of practice four components of learning (Wenger 2008) that reflected the prominence of the women's experiences in shaping their own learning. Each key theme reflected how the women were always peripheral to the learning environment and their participation marginal. The contribution to current thinking around part-time PhDs is the critique of extant normative practice, this research illustrates and exemplifies how these existing processes marginalise mothers doing part-time doctorates and points to new approaches in practice.

The women in this study embarked on a part-time PhD in an attempt to create new meaning to their current situation. They hoped that through mutual engagement and joint enterprise within the PhD community of practice they would experience learning in many forms, leading them on a trajectory to master practitioner and achievement of a PhD. However, their involvement in the community of practice was at best, peripheral and this marginal position denied them opportunities for enhanced learning through knowledge sharing and development of a shared repertoire. The normative process of communities of practice was therefore not what the women experienced. A lack of in-group participation, tension between roles, expectations around motherhood, a fractured student experience and the management of their own guilt and lack of self-belief provided a very different reality of part-time PhD study. Thus the women were exposed to 'marginalities of experience', their competence never fully realized within the context of the community of practice due to them being 'repressed, feared or ignored' (Wenger 2008:216). This marginalization of experience in the community of practice resulted in the women not being included in mutual engagement of learning and the resulting joint enterprise that comes from members working towards new knowledge with a common

goal. This in turn, left them with little exposure to the shared repertoire necessary for learning within a community of practice (Tummons 2012). For this situation to change, women must be supported in gaining full, active participation in a community of practice. This would enhance their learning experience in terms of their identity, sense of communal belonging and the practice of PhD study.

8. Limitations and future considerations

This study elected to focus on, for reasons identified in the methodology, the North West of England. It is possible that studies in other areas of the United Kingdom may produce different data, a UK-wide study could therefore provide a broader perspective. It is also acknowledged that research considering mothers studying for a part-time PhD in academic institutions globally could enhance current findings. Because one of the aims of the study was to surface in-depth, personal data, an interpretivist methodological approach was adopted with a key aspect being researcher subjectivity. Some may consider an approach that recognizes the role of the researcher in producing the data as problematic. The subjectivity may provide one interpretation of meaning from the women's narratives, therefore involvement of other researchers provides a rounded perspective and representation of the data. The focus of the study was on mothers involved in part-time PhD study. Perhaps a consideration for mothers involved in any form of postgraduate study could have opened up the criteria for more participants and a wider range of emergent themes. It could be argued that interviewing the women once is a limiting factor as it is only a snapshot of their overall PhD journey, their feelings towards the process may have altered as they progressed. However, as the women were all at different stages of doctoral study, the research overall provides a range of experiences across the whole process of studying for a PhD, thus exposing perspectives from a number of stages. These perspectives, regardless of the stage the women were at, were consistent, there was a commonality of feelings and experiences across all thirty-five women.

For future research, a longitudinal approach would be adopted, considering the existing participants in this study and how they have progressed with the PhD five years later. Engaging in another in-depth interview would allow the researcher to explore where part-time PhD study led the women, if they were still studying or had completed and what they gained from the experience. It would also be interesting to hear what advice they would give women who were considering embarking on a part-time PhD. Another option for future research would be to explore the phenomenon of mothers undertaking part-time PhDs in a global setting, exploring the different institutional frameworks and developing

a comparative study of experiences in a number of different countries. This would reflect cultural, social and economic differences as well as institutional protocols.

9. References

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10. Appendix

Questionnaire

General

1. Name.
2. Age.
3. Occupation (full or part-time)
4. No. of children & ages
5. Phd - subject area
6. Stage of PhD
7. Place of study

Identity

1. How does being a mum make you feel
2. Do you feel that you adopt multiple ‘roles’ or ‘selves’ depending on the context you are in?

Motivations

1. What were the motivations for you embarking on a research degree?
2. What were your expectations? Is the reality matching the expectations?
3. Why at this time in your life?
4. What do you hope will happen when you complete?

Experiences

1. What has been you overall experience as a student at X?
2. How have you found being a student and a mum?

Dynamics – how did studying affect your relationships?

1. How has the relationship been between you and your supervisor?
2. Did you come into contact with other students?
3. Has studying had an impact on the rest of your life?

Consequences

1. Is the experience of doing a PhD what you expected?
2. What has been the most difficult aspect so far?
3. If you could advise institutions on the way they manage the doctoral process/experience – what would you suggest they do/ Implement/consider?